


IN THE
DAYS
OF
GOLDSMITH
BY
M. Mc.D.
BODKIN

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In the Days of Goldsmith

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

LORD EDWARD FITZGERALD

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POTEEN PUNCH

PAUL BECK

A STOLEN LIFE

THE REBELS

In the Days of Goldsmith

By
M. McD. Bodkin, K.C.



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‘FROM the general tone of Goldsmith’s biography, it is evident that his faults, at the worst, were but negative, while his merits were great and decided. He was no one’s enemy but his own : his errors, in the main, inflicted evil on none but himself, and were so blended with humorous, and even affecting, circumstances as to disarm anger and conciliate kindness. Where eminent talent is united to spotless virtue, we are awed and dazzled into admiration, but our admiration is cold and reverential ; while there is something in the harmless infirmities of a good and great, but erring individual, that pleads touchingly to our nature ; and we turn more kindly to the object of our idolatry when we find that, like ourselves, he is mortal, and is frail. The epithet so often heard, and in such kindly tones, of “ Poor Goldsmith ! ” speaks volumes. Few who consider the real compound of admirable and whimsical qualities which form his character would wish to prune away its eccentricities, trim its grotesque luxuriance, and clip it down to the decent formalities of rigid virtue. “ Let not his frailties be remembered,” said Johnson. “ He was a very great man.” But, for our part, we rather say, “ Let them be remembered,” since their tendency is to endear, and we question whether he himself would not feel gratified in hearing his reader, after dwelling with admiration on the proofs of his greatness, close the volume with the kind-hearted phrase, so fondly and familiarly ejaculated, of “ Poor Goldsmith ! ”’—
WASHINGTON IRVING.

PART I

In the Days of Goldsmith

CHAPTER I

KISSING GOES BY FAVOUR

‘ Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed,
And batten on this moor? Ha ! have you eyes?
You cannot call it love.’

THE man was standing at the window, tapping his jack-boots impatiently with his riding-whip. The maid knelt on the brocaded sofa with her elbows on the arm of it and her chin on the palms of her large white hands, watching him mockingly. He was tall, gaunt, broad-shouldered, hard-featured, clean-shaven. A big nose ran down his face, with small, deep-set eyes on either side. His mouth was wide and thick-lipped, his chin square. He was dressed richly and in youthful fashion, with broad-skirted, plum-coloured coat and knee-breeches, and a brodered silk waistcoat. But his hair was scanty and grizzled at the temples, and his skin the colour of an overripe apple, wrinkled, yellowish, with little veins, and splotches of red. He was a

man of about thirty years, whom dissipation had withered, not bloated.

The girl did not look more than twenty, but ripe for her age. She had a smooth, cream-coloured complexion, warming to red in the cheeks, sleek black hair coiled in great masses on her head and worn low down on a low forehead. Her eyebrows were black and thick, her eyelashes were black and long. The eyes were black, too, and very bright, but the heavy lids drooped over them till at times they were mere luminous slits. Ripe and red were her lips, her chin prominent and well-formed and dimpled at the point.

She was dressed very plainly, with almost Quaker simplicity, in a dark, closely-fitting gown with no more frills or tucks or flounces than a leopard's skin. But the womanly curves of her seductive figure were more suggestively accentuated by the closely-fitting dress than by flattering finery. Face and figure had a wonderful attractiveness. Her eyes narrowed and closed as she looked at the man by the window, and a slow, languorous smile showed a gleam of white teeth.

'Well, well, say on,' he cried, facing round from the window. 'What did he swear he'd do? Don't play the cat with me, Carry.'

'What would you give to know, Toney?'

He mastered his impatience with a half-strangled oath and came over to her.

'Don't tease, there's a good wench. It's your concern as much as mine. You know I love you, Carry, and mean to wed you.' He slipped his arm

round her waist and kissed the full red lips that were lifted to his as a cat lifts its sleek head to be stroked. 'You know, wench, old Simon Jenkins, the miser, that lies adying inside there, is worth a big plum in land and money, and I'm his nephew and heir.

'He will not leave you a single stiver, Toney,' she said slowly.

This time the curse came out unmistakably as his arm dropped from her waist and he stared in blank dismay.

But her eyes and smile mocked his anger.

'Is this the best news you have for me, you jade, after all your promises?'

'Ay, the best,' she answered saucily; 'nor so bad, neither, if you will hear it to the close. Old Simon likes not a bone in your great body. "A hectoring roysterer," he calls you, "a blood-stained Mohock, a spendthrift who would squander his hard-won substance on drabs and drink." Nay, curse not, Toney; I but quote the old man's saying. Do I not know you sober and virtuous? "He shall never touch stiver of my leaving," quoth old Simon. "If I must part with my money, it shall go to those I love and who love me."'

'And who may those be?' Toney asked sulkily. 'I know of none such.'

'Out upon you, dullard! Is there not myself, the simple-hearted, grateful daughter, whom he has adopted and reared like a nun in a convent? Is there not Signor Simplicity, Roderick O'Connor, the cousin whom he has bred like a monk? We love

old Simon, and we love each other like two innocent dicky-birds on a bough. So much, at least, you know, you naughtily, roystering Toney !'

'So much I know for the devil's truth, Mistress Innocence,' Toney Jenkins answered, with a grin, 'but to the rest—what of the will he had devised ? To whom goes the coin ?'

'Old Simon has approved of our innocent loves, you wicked reprobate ! For Signor Simplicity has made that confession to the old man, though he lacks courage to make it to poor me. A dawdler and a nincompoop !' she spirted out, with sudden spitefulness, and dropped as suddenly back into the canting tone. 'He has won my simple maiden's heart—so old Simon has been taught—and we are to be married.'

'But the will ?' he cried sharply. 'A truce to this foolery, my girl : tell me the will.'

'Why, this is the will,' she answered, with a mocking drawl. 'He and I are to share old Simon's thousands between us.'

'And for me ?'

'Weeping and gnashing of teeth is thy portion—the reprobate's inheritance. See, if you credit me not, here is the paper to speak for me.'

She drew a folded paper from her bodice as she spoke, and held it mockingly before him.

'The will !' he cried, and grabbed at it eagerly. But she drew it dexterously through his closing fingers, and kept it out of reach.

'Nay, 'tis but a copy, honest Toney. The original he gives to the custody of Master Oliver Goldsmith,

the poet, who is godfather to my sweetest lover and bridegroom that is to be.'

'What says the paper? Read, wench—read!'

'It is short as your temper, Toney. "I will and bequeath all I die possessed of to my cousin Roderick O'Connor provided always he be lawfully married within a six months from my death.'

'Married to you, wench? Is it not so?'

'It is so intended, but it is not so set out in the will.'

'Damnation! He may pick any light wench off the street and take land and money with his loose bargain.'

'You art but a fool, Toney—a muddy-pated fool at best. The boy loves me and none but me—loves me and reverences me as an angel whom you know as a woman of flesh and blood. He has heard nothing of this term of the will, nor is like to hear, for I have begged of old Father Simon that I may tell him of it. He is my slave, I tell you. At the motion of my innocent little finger he will come and go, and I will shyly hold him on and off till the six months' term has expired. Then you shall have the money as heir, and you and I, Toney, man and wife together, will laugh the fool to scorn. What think you of my pretty plan?'

'Humph! Six months is a long trial of a man's constancy. A fasting love will scarce live through it.'

'You speak for yourself, reprobate. He will wait and work for me for twice seven years if need be, as Jacob did for Rachel. Nor need'st you fast

the time out, either, Toney. I will marry you when you please, and none shall be the wiser for it.'

Her eyelids drooped as she said it, her lips parted a little, and her voice was soft as a purring cat.

'Nay, that were not well, wench,' he answered hastily, 'till the six months have come and gone. Perchance——'

'You fool!' she broke in hastily, and sprang from the sofa. 'Do you think that——'

She would have struck him with her open hand on the broad cheek, but a knock at the chamber door arrested her in her mad career. She sank instantly back on the couch. Diving into her pocket, she fished out a small, lace-edged handkerchief, which she pressed to her eyes. Every line of the pensive face and drooping figure spoke of meekness, sorrowing.

'Come in,' she cried in mournful tones, as the knock, after a pause, was repeated more insistently.

Then came softly into the room a squat, square-built, muscular little man very gaily dressed. Very ugly, too, one would have said at first view, and instantly would have repented the hasty verdict. True, the homely face was ploughed deep with the disfiguring ravages of the small-pox. But there was in it a gentleness and tenderness that made a beauty of their own. A kindly, generous spirit looked cheerily out on the virtues and follies of the world through those brave, bright eyes of his.

They grew brighter with pitying tears at sight of the drooping figure of the weeping girl on the sofa.

'Caroline, my poor child!' he said, and touched

her shoulder softly as he spoke. 'I have come on his own request to visit our good friend Master Simon. May I see him?'

She looked up in his face, silent for a moment, as if dazed with grief. It was sorrow acted to the life.

'He is sick unto death,' she whispered; 'the physician has left him even now without hope. But he has called for you more than once, Dr. Goldsmith, and he waits for you impatiently. You know the way to his chamber.'

As the doctor crossed the room his eye lit with surprise upon the figure of the man at the window. The quick-witted wench touched his sleeve and whispered softly:

'It is Master Anthony Jenkins'—her voice trembled at the name; 'he is an ill-living man. Father has even said so, and I fear him. Yet, when he came sorrowing and eager to make his peace, I might not deny him the house. But I stayed him in this outer room, knowing Father Simon's heart, and fearing for his weakness.'

'You did wisely, my girl,' Goldsmith said, 'and he did well and wisely to be stayed by you.'

'He is rough and uncouth, and they whisper wild stories of his doings. I am afraid of him.'

'In truth, his reputation is not of the best,' Goldsmith said. 'Dame Gossip has blabbed of him. But she is ever a lying jade, sparing of good report and prodigal of evil. The white man she will have but gray, and the gray man black. I warrant the man is better than he is spoken.'

‘It may be,’ said the timid maiden, ‘but, none the less, he frightens me.’

She glanced back with a comical grimace at the bugbear as Dr. Goldsmith passed before her into the inner room.

He grinned, amused at her comic pantomime, but yet shook his head doubtingly.

‘I’ faith, lass !’ he said, ‘you frighten me. Where got you all these witches’ tricks in this dull den ? I doubt you are too clever for a plain man’s management.’

‘It is not great argument of my wit that I love you, Toney, plain man as you do most truly call yourself.’

‘I am as well favoured as another,’ he growled.

‘Right, so that other be as ill-favoured as you, but such a paragon is hard to find.’

‘You have a passing bitter tongue, Carry. It stings like a blade’s point. If I be such a one as you say, why speak to me of love ?’

She laughed in answer—a low, rich, musical laugh—in mockery of herself and him.

‘Ay, why indeed ? Seems it not strange ? There is no answer but I love you, and yet that is no right answer neither, for you, my rough Toney, are not a man to be loved, and yet—and yet, I love you. You are rough and coarse and strong—a man with the wild animal alive in you, and I love you for it.’

She came to him unasked, and laid her shapely hand on his shoulder and her fair face close to his rough one. But when he would have kissed her

once again she put him from her, yet with a gentleness that was almost an invitation.

‘Now must you go. My milk-and-water lover comes to woo. I hear his faltering footstep on the stairs. Nay, stay if you please, and hear our wooing. It will serve as a stage-play for your amusement. “The Bashful Youth and the Modest Maiden” shall be the title. There is a hole in the screen yonder through which you can see and hear.’

CHAPTER II

A MISTRESS OF WILES

‘I know a maiden fair to see—
Take care ;
She can both false and friendly be—
Beware, beware ;
Trust her not, she is fooling thee.
She has two eyes so soft and brown—
Take care ;
She gives a side-glance and looks down—
Beware, beware.’

‘HEIGH-HO!’ The girl sank again on the couch with a mocking mimicry of a profound sigh, turning her back to the door that opened softly and let in her bashful lover.

‘Heigh-ho!’ His sigh as he entered was like an echo of her own. Following the sigh a well-shaped, manly youth, clean limbed and deep chested, clad in close-fitting black velvet, with lace on the collar and at the sleeves, came softly into the room. A frank and manly face was his—a face to outface the world with mirth and laughter. But the poor youth looked very glum and woebegone, for the exaggerated melancholy of a first love had marked him for her own.

‘Heigh-ho!’ again from the sofa. This time it was a soft, pitiful little sigh—the very ghost of a sigh. But it startled the young lover like a thunderbolt. The book he carried under his arm dropped with a thud on the carpet. He flushed red as a naughty schoolboy at the sudden presence of his master, and would have slipped slyly off the way he came, but she saw him through half-closed eyes, and called to him.

‘Roderick!’

‘Yes, Caroline.’

‘Oh! I’m so unhappy, Roderick.’

‘I wish I might comfort you, Caroline.’

‘No one can comfort me. He is dying, the only living creature in the wide world that loves me.’

She looked the young man innocently in the face as she said it. The light in those dark eyes made him shiver; the beauty of her flesh frightened the boy.

‘Oh, Caroline!’ he stammered out, ‘I love you; you know I love you!’ He dropped on one knee beside the sofa and caught her hand, white, firm, and cool, between his two fevered palms.

But still the innocent young maid would not understand.

‘Of course, I know you love me, Roderick, but not as he did, and I’m fond of you too.’

‘Do you love me a little, Carry?’

‘I love you a great deal, Roderick—better than I love Dickey or Puck.’

Dickey was her canary, and Puck her Prince Charlie.

The reprobate behind the screen almost choked with suppressed laughter.

But there was a childlike simplicity in her voice that dashed the fervour of poor Roderick's love-making. It seemed somehow an insult to her sweet innocence.

'You are too young, Caroline,' he said, 'to understand how much I love you. You are yet but a child. I will not trouble your innocence with my love.'

He had dropped her hand awkwardly enough, and now he would have fled. But this did not suit the plans of simple Caroline.

'Nay, you are but one short year my elder,' she said. 'If you are a man, then I am a woman.' Her eyes warmed him now more than her words had chilled.

Yet still he held back the torrent of his love lest he might wrong her innocence.

'You loved me better when I was a child,' she went on softly; 'you kissed me then sometimes.'

The alluring light in her eyes lit a sudden fire in him that flamed beyond restraint. He caught her in his arms and crushed her close to him, and showered kisses on her lips. All the passionate woman in her responded to his passion as she lay warm in his arms. This was indeed the way to win her if he had the wit to know it.

But a moment later he was stricken with grief and shame. His arms fell from about her waist, and he stood back in sheepish awkwardness, head drooped, hands dangling.

In her heart she mocked him.

‘Caroline!’ he whispered hoarsely, ‘can you forgive me?’

‘Forgive you, Roderick!’—with innocent surprise that ignored the meaning of his kisses as she had ignored the meaning of his love. ‘I am glad you kissed me; it was very good of you. *He* always kissed me when he was pleased with me.’

She dropped her face in her hands, and her shoulders shook with emotion—sorrow, poor Roderick thought.

He was wild to comfort her. He drew one of the hands from her face, and held it captive, and the clinging touch of it gave him courage to speak.

‘Caroline,’ he went on, ‘I know it is wicked of me to speak to you of such things at such a time. But I cannot help myself. I love you, Caroline—not as a child loves child, or as a brother loves a sister, but as man loves woman. My whole life will be spent to keep grief away from yours. Pity me, Caroline, and time will teach you what love means.’

‘I fear you have taught me already, Roderick,’ she whispered softly.

‘Oh, my darling, you love me a little!’

‘I love you a great deal.’

‘And you will marry me?’

She opened on him wide eyes of innocent surprise.

‘But why marry, Roderick? Is it not enough to love? I never could tell why people wanted so to marry.’

He had no explanation ready.

‘It is usual,’ he said weakly, ‘when people love.’

‘But, Roderick, is it right to talk of such things when he lies a-dying who was so good to both of us?’

Poor Roderick was stricken with remorse at her reminder.

‘You are right, Caroline; it is unseemly and ungrateful. The words were forced from me, I cannot tell how’—she could have told how if she had so chosen; ‘I should not have spoken, yet I cannot be sorry that I spoke. He wished it, too; he told me that he wished it.’

‘And he told me also, Roderick.’

‘It is not for his sake you love me, Carry?’ he queried, with sudden jealousy.

‘I love you because I love you, dearest,’ she whispered. ‘Can you look me in the eyes and doubt it?’

He looked her in the eyes, and closed his own lest he might look too long, for their light maddened him.

‘And you will marry me?’

‘Perhaps some time—a year hence, or half a year. But please speak no more of it now. Oh! leave me, leave me; I am ashamed of myself and of the thoughts you have awakened in me while he lies dying. If you love me, dearest, leave me.’

He kept his hands back from her with a strong effort.

‘You will be true to me?’ he asked.

‘True to death! But leave me now; do not kiss me, do not touch me—it seems treason to my grief.’

As the door closed behind him she laughed a low

derisive laugh, and there was a hoarse echo from behind the screen.

‘Why, Carry,’ Jenkins began, his evil face showing cautiously. But the door opened again, and he skulked back into his hiding-place.

There was that solemnity in the homely face and figure of Dr. Goldsmith as he entered that is begotten of communion with death. He had in his hand a folded paper fastened with a large splash of red sealing-wax.

Caroline’s piteous gaze was on his face as he came in.

‘He is dead!’ she cried excitedly. ‘I can see in your look he is dead,’ and she fell to weeping disconsolately.

Goldsmith was deeply touched with a pity for her that was almost pain. He caught her hands within his own. When she had moderated her sobbing he spoke to her very gently.

‘I do not blame you, my child, to ease your heart with tears. For he that is dead hath loved you dearly, and love is too rare a gift to be lightly lost.’

At this she broke out sobbing again, but softly, that she might not lose a word, and the kindly voice went on:

‘You feel your grief, my child, more keenly because you are so young. ’Tis one of the penalties that youth must pay. Its pains are sharp and short. Youth lives its life, and age dies its death. It is the world’s law. Next spring will cover his naked grave with flowers, and heal the wounds in your heart till but the soft remembrance of your grief remains,

like the sweet faint perfume of the flowers on his grave.'

'I shall never hear his voice again,' she broke out.

'His latest words were of you,' the doctor said soothingly. 'Another time I will tell you of them, and they will comfort you.'

'Now! now!' entreated the sorrow-stricken girl, lifting a flushed, tear-stained face from the sofa pillow. 'It eases my heart to speak of him.'

'He told me,' the doctor went on, 'what pleased me much to hear—that you and my young friend and godson, Roderick O'Connor, are affectionate lovers. He had set his heart on your marriage. With his last breath he blessed your union, and prayed that his death might not delay its early consummation. In this will he said there was ample provision for you both.'

'He was so good to me. I may read, may I not, in his own dear hand——'

'Nay, child, you see it is sealed with his own seal, and on it is writ plain in his own hand an order bidding me open it first on the day of Roderick O'Connor's wedding, which he prays may be speedily. That rests with you, Caroline, for if I know my godson's heart; he worships you.'

'He is indeed a wise and gentle youth, exceeding meek, and I love him dearly, and yet I am afraid.'

'But why?—of what?'

'Nay, that I know not; of the marriage itself belike. It is a fearsome thing for a maid.'

The minx was playing her pranks with the doctor himself. There was a light in her timid eyes that

stirred his Irish blood that age had not chilled. He rose to take his leave.

‘Then I must needs send Roderick to persuade you,’ he said. ‘A lover’s arguments are most prevailing when marriage is the theme. Grief now holds first place in your young heart, but by-and-by love will claim his rights, and not be denied.’

He kissed her hand with quaint courtesy, and was gone.

CHAPTER III

TWO ARE COMPANY

'Tis well to be witty and wise,
'Tis well to be loyal and true,
'Tis well to be off with the old love
Before you are on with the new.'

ANTHONY JENKINS' burly form came boldly from behind the screen.

'I thought the dull proser would never go,' he growled. 'He would have you weep over the old skinflint that the devil has taken to himself at last, yet leaving his money, the best part of him, behind.'

She raised a pretty finger in mocking protest.

'You are rude and irreverent, Toney,' she droned sanctimoniously. 'It behoves me to mourn for the dear friend and father I have lost—the dear father who cooped me up in this hole from all the resort of the world and made me lead the life of a nun. Ay, cooped me up for his own use, as a chicken is cooped for the table. For let me tell you, Anthony, that, simple as I sit here, I might have been Mistress Simeon Jenkins if I had so chosen. I might have mourned as his widow instead of daughter for that good old man. Failing himself, he offers me that

nauseous dish of virtuous milk and water young Master Roderick. Dr. Goldsmith spoke sooth, Toney—'tis only love can comfort in such grief.'

'A man can never tell if you be in jest or earnest. You were tender enough with young lack-liver just now, and took his kisses patiently.'

'I'faith, he kisses most persuadingly,' she said, glancing with a kind of demure malice at her smouldering companion.

'I swear you are but a fickle light-o'-love. So a man kiss you you care not who the man be.' He caught her arm roughly; she did not wince, but answered his violence with mocking laughter.

'You will be ever a fool, Toney, and tangle yourself in any net I spread for you. There must be flies to catch our fish, and lines to hold. Those kisses are but earnest of a debt. Nay, start not; you are too rough and ready, a debt that shall never be paid in full. I will hold him with sweet words and kisses as with a silken cord till six months be sped, then I will whistle him down the wind.'

'Can I trust you, wench? You are slippery as an eel in any man's fingers. Perchance I may be found your fool, not he.'

'Then I will set him loose amongst marriageable maids, to be wedded ere one month of the six has sped. Will that please you, you old growler?'

'Nay, tie him tight to your apron-string, Carry. I care not so the fortune comes my way.'

'You care not!' she said with sudden heat, more stung by this carelessness than by his jealousy.

Oh, you dullard, do I count for nothing to you? Look at me! look at me! Am I not worth winning?’

She faced him in all her alluring beauty, with passion half asleep in her dark eyes. A man might have bartered his soul for her body.

‘If you prize the fortune above my love, then I will marry him to plague you, and we two will spend the great fortune freely between us while you whine with dry lips like to Dives in hell.’

Her vehemence frightened him; her beauty abashed him. He caught her roughly to his strong arms, and closed her angry lips with a rude kiss thrice repeated.

The vigour of her anger relaxed instantly. She nestled to him with lips half parted, and looked up into his face with eyes in which love smouldered ready to break fiercely into flame.

‘Then you love, me, Carry, and not yon superfine gentleman, who woos in such set phrases, who kneels to you as a saint?’

‘I love you, old rough and rugged, because of the man in you. You know, I am a true woman. I want warm love, not chill worship. I love you best because you are strong and masterful and hold me tight and hard, and woo boldly with plain ay and nay phrase, and will not be denied. Good Master Roderick O’Connor’—there was a world of contempt in her tones; she seemed to spurn the name—‘I hate his girl’s face, his smooth prate, his ambling courtesy. I would as lief be dieted with milk and water as wedded to this male maid. Give me a man like

yourself, Toney. I would rather have a rake than a milksop any day.'

She poised herself on tiptoe and kissed him unasked.

So excited was she, so love-inflamed, she did not see the door had opened softly, and even now it framed a figure struck suddenly rigid, a face utterly pale with amazement.

Roderick O'Connor, lured by a restless longing that draws the moth to the light, coming shyly back for a last word and smile from her he loved, had opened the door timidly, on a sight that struck him motionless and dumb—his affianced wife clasped close in the arms of the Mohock, Anthony Jenkins. He heard her languorous murmur of passion for another, her scornful reviling of himself. He saw the two close in passionate kissing. Like one in a nightmare, powerless to move, he stood silent through it all.

Then the woman saw him of a sudden, saw the pale face and staring eyes, and knew at a glance what he had seen and heard.

Instinctively she cried out and broke from Anthony Jenkins' arms, but her first look at Roderick's face told her the game was up.

Jenkins looked when she looked, and stood sullenly fumbling his sword-hilt with a big red hand.

The woman, mad with the wrath of exposure and defeat, gave her tongue free rein, eager to sting.

'Eavesdropper and spy!' she cried, 'I trust you are well satisfied. You have proved the proverb that secret listeners hear no good of themselves.'

Like you better the bitter truth or the sweet lies, you purblind fool? Nay, I own it, I would have fooled you to the top of your bent that I might have;—that I might make sport of you. And yet I knew you not then as I know you now—for eaves-dropper and spy! You have changed my laughter to loathing.'

Still he said no word, but looked at her curiously, moistening his dry lips.

There was something in his eyes that abashed even her. But she brazened it out all the more fiercely on that account.

'I charge you home that you came to pimp and spy, and you stand there like a dumb dog, lacking the courage to foreswear yourself.'

'You know it is false—false as your vows, false as your own heart. You would fain hide your own shame by shaming me. Woman!'

'Woman, forsooth!' she cried mockingly; 'not darling Carry any more?'

'Silence, you treacherous wanton, that hath neither truth nor shame. Silence for your womanhood's sake if not for your own.'

'I am a right woman in my mood,' she answered saucily.

'And are others such as you?' ;

'Ay, marry are they to love men and laugh at foolish boys. You made me sport, Master Roderick; in troth I thank you for it. It was merry sport while it lasted, and I am right sorry it is past.'

'And I loved this woman! My God! I loved this woman and believed her as true and pure as

she was beautiful. On this devil in maid's form I lavished the wealth of my young heart's hopes ! Vile as beautiful, you have made beauty itself loathsome in my eyes ; you have made me hate all womankind for your sake.'

' Ay, as the sick child hates lollypops, 'twill hold till some other girl comes along to play with you while it pleases her, to throw you away when she grows weary, as I have done.'

' Shameless ! shameless ! I will not trust my tongue to speak my thoughts of you, for I loved you once. But for your burly paramour there——'

Anthony Jenkins had up to this stood apart, abashed by discovery, wroth at Roderick's violence.

Now his smouldering anger broke into fierce flame.

' And you would speak of me, my young bantam ! Sort your words more warily, or I may chance to cut your comb. I am no silly wench to be rated, but a man that wears a sword and can use it.'

' Then use it now !' cried young Roderick, his anger finding sudden relief in action——' use it here and now.'

The girl's breath came quick and hard, her shapely bosom rose and fell, but the light in her half-closed eyes was fierce as the tigress, and she made no motion to step between the fighters.

Then Anthony Jenkins laid a huge hand on his sword-hilt, and drew it slowly half out of the scabbard, but sent it back again with noisy clatter.

' Nay, lad,' he cried, ' I will humour you, be sure of that, all in good time, but not here or now.'

‘ You are afraid.’

‘ Afraid of you, a raw youth, a boy for whom a birch-rod were the fitting weapon ! In troth, I *am* afraid, but not of you. I am afraid of judge and jury and hangman if I should spit you on my sword like a lark, and no witness by to say it was done in fair fight. I will send a friend to you or to him you name, and if you dare meet me I will promise to cure that trouble of your heart with a few inches of cold steel.’

‘ If I dare meet you ! If I dare eat or drink or sleep ! I dare meet you anywhere, at any time, and give you the chastisement you deserve. The hours will be days to me till we meet.’

‘ Make the most of them,’ cried the bully, as the door closed on the angry boy, ‘ for I promise you they are your last days in this world.’ Then he turned sulkily to the woman. ‘ A pretty pass your plottings have come to, Mistress Caroline !’

‘ He will have no more traffic with women, for my sake. You have heard him swear it. Without woman the man may not marry, and without marriage the will cannot stand.’

‘ How long, think you, will that mood hold ? Nay, you have said it. Till another wench, black-eyes or blue-eyes—blue for a preference, for you are dark—look sweetly on him—no longer. He will want a woman to heal the wound in his heart a woman has made. Nay, I know a surer way with him, or else good-bye, good fortune.’

‘ You would not slay the boy, Toney ?’

She came close to him and looked him in the face.

There was something of a tremor in her voice. Pity, fear, or excitement, who shall say ?

He laughed a hoarse, awkward laugh.

‘Nay, for those who will quarrel there is always danger.’

‘But the boy knows no trick of fence.’

‘The more fool he to fight with a man who does.’

CHAPTER IV

MURDER À LA MODE

‘Ef you take a sword and dror it,
An you stick a feller through,
Guv’mment ain’t to answer for it;
Gawd ’ll send the bill to you.’

‘You must not fight with him.’

Goldsmith laid his hand on Roderick’s shoulder in friendly entreaty. They were in the poet’s chambers at the Temple. The place was a litter of untidiness, a huge waste-paper basket with books and papers strewn about in all directions. But a portion of the central table had been swept clear, and on it some cold victuals and a bottle of old port wine set. There was a big man sitting at the table, solemnly sipping the old port, dressed in a long, broad-skirted brown coat with a shabby little wig comically perched awry over a massive face, seamed and scarred by disease.

Beside him sat a small man, neatly dressed, alert, restless, curious, with eyes and ears on the strain, watching the big man eagerly yet respectfully, as a hungry jackal might be supposed to watch a lazy lion when dinner is delayed.

‘On your own showing, Roddy, the girl is not worth fighting for,’ Goldsmith went on entreatingly. ‘You have no quarrel with the man. It’s no fault of his that the wench prefers him to you. Truly taken, ’tis his loss, and your gain. You must not fight with him.’

‘I have no choice,’ Roderick answered firmly. ‘Dear friend and second father, do not urge me further! I have no choice but loss of honour, which well I know you would not have me lose.’

The boy had strangely changed, had grown pale and haggard in a week. His eyelids were flushed and galled and swollen with the salt of tears, but there was no touch of woman’s weakness in his voice, and the eyes that looked Goldsmith steadily in the face were the eyes of a resolute man.

‘He has called me to account for the words I spoke of him and her. He has sent a friend to me. Would you have me, like a craven, eat my own words sauced with his insolence because I dare not fight?’

‘Not because you dare not, but because you will not,’ Goldsmith answered soothingly. ‘To kill or be killed—it is a fearsome choice, Roddy.’

‘You carry a sword yourself, doctor, and would use it if need were.’

‘Ay, if need were.’

‘There is need here.’

‘He will slay you,’ cried the doctor impetuously, forgetting his high morality in his affection. ‘’Tis that I fear. Should you slay him I care not, but you have no touch of skill in your weapon, and he is a noted brawler, who has twice pinked his man.’

‘Nay, I care not ; better death than life dishonoured, and, in truth, I have no desire to live.’

‘Oh, foolish youth!’ Goldsmith cried again, ‘that will not know itself and its own worth. This sorrow is but a cloud on your April sky, a briefly passing cloud which you think will never lift. The sun of love will shine on you again a better and a truer love. Life is a great gift ; ’tis all we have and are ; without it we are mere clods of putrefying flesh. Will you let a bully’s sword-thrust end all and send you out of the air and sunshine to join the earthworms in the close darkness underground?’ The good doctor’s voice shook with the earnestness of his appeal. ‘Duelling,’ he cried, ‘is but a polite name for murder ; it is ever a crime.’

Here the big man at the table shook himself and swayed his ponderous figure till the strong oak chair creaked with the weight and motion.

‘Why, sir,’ he broke out at last, ‘benevolent purpose will not justify inconsiderate speech. You have spoken of death as the terminus of existence when it is the opening portal of a larger life. Convention must ever be allowed some part in the government of conduct. The canons of society, while they exist, must be obeyed. Therefore, though duelling be in itself a thing wicked and to be condemned, yet the condemnation does not extend to the individual who is constrained by irresistible pressure of public opinion either to fight a duel or to forfeit his honourable reputation.’

The little man was busy with a notebook half under the table while these ponderous sentences

were pronounced ; as they closed with a snort he wriggled in ecstasy.

‘ Excellent, sir ! ’ he cried ecstatically. ‘ Morality, if I may so say, is directly begotten of public opinion, and must needs show obedience to its parent.’

But Goldsmith would not hear of it.

‘ I trust, sir,’ he cried, ‘ that right has a higher origin than human respect. You would surely not subscribe to Hamlet’s doctrine that “ there is nothing that is good or ill but thinking makes so.” Your argument would justify murder in a society of murderers or theft in a society of thieves.’

Poor Boswell looked up in open-mouthed dismay to hear the infallibility of the oracle thus impugned. Johnson made ready to crush the rash intruder under his ponderous periods.

‘ Duelling,’ he began, ‘ is the inevitable product of superior civility. As men advance in refinement various causes of offence arise which are considered of such importance that life must be staked to atone for them. A body which has received a fine polish may be easily soiled. Before men arrive at this elevation of artificial refinement, if one tells his neighbour he lies, his neighbour tells him he lies ; if his neighbour gives a blow, he returns it. But in a state of highly polished society an affront is held to be a serious injury. It must therefore be resented after the method that society prescribes, as men have agreed to ostracize the man who refuses to fight a duel on adequate provocation. Now, sir, it is never unlawful to fight in self-defence. He, then, who fights a duel does not fight from passion against his

antagonist, but in protection of himself, to avert the stigma of the world and escape banishment from society. I may desire that there was not in society that superfluity of refinement. But while such opinions generally prevail, a man is justified in duelling.'

'Surely, sir, a man may not do wrong because the world counts it right? Conscience, not convention, must be his guide. Murder cannot be justified by public approval.'

'Why, sir,' cried Dr. Johnson, growing angry as he felt the pressure of the argument and strove to evade it, 'I would have you to consider that the cowardly murderer slays his victim without exposing himself. The honourable duellist accepts the same danger as his antagonist.'

'Surely, doctor,' Goldsmith said, 'a contempt for one's own life can give no right to take the life of another.'

'Sir,' stormed Dr. Johnson, 'you argue in opposition to ancient and modern authority. If public war be allowed to be consistent with Christian morality, duelling can by no means be condemned. The duellist is driven to single combat by individual provocation, the soldier without personal quarrel engages in general massacre.'

'You have but proved,' Goldsmith retorted, 'that war is wrong, not that duelling is right.'

Johnson rolled like an earthquake, and blew himself out for a thundering rejoinder. In the midst of this preliminary puffing and snorting young O'Connor contrived to interpose :

‘Then, Dr. Goldsmith, I may not hope for your countenance in the field, since duelling goes so sore against your conscience?’

‘Nay, lad, if you will fight, despite morality and good counsel, I will be at your side. It shall never be said that Oliver Goldsmith deserted a friend for conscience’ sake.’

‘Sir,’ Dr. Johnson boomed out, ‘your too facile confession of weakness is the most appropriate and conclusive reply to your too elevated profession of morality. Your precept is discredited by your performance.’

‘Nay, my friend,’ cried Goldsmith, ‘the fault is in me, not in my saying. You know the passage, for I have heard you cite it—“If to do were as easy as to know what to do, chapels had been churches and poor men’s cottages princes’ palaces.” It is a good divine that follows his own instruction. I can easier teach twenty what were good to be done than be one of the twenty to follow my own teaching. “The brain may devise laws for the blood, but a hot temper leaps over a cold decree.” So, Roddy, my lad, let good or ill betide, I am with you.’

The youth wrung his hand heartily.

‘Six of the clock to-morrow in the Green Park,’ he whispered. ‘I will call for you here;’ and with a grave bow to the others he passed out of the room.

Goldsmith sat staring at the door without moving or speaking a long minute after it had closed behind his godson.

Then he drew a deep breath that ended like a sigh, and blew his nose lustily with a variegated

and voluminous silk handkerchief, and bolted abruptly from the room.

‘Poor Goldy grows a greater fool daily,’ whispered Boswell to Johnson. ‘It was well said by friend Davy, “He writes like an angel and talks like poor Poll,” though, for my part, I could never find that special merit in his writing neither.’

‘Because, sir, you lack capacity to appreciate. The fairest landscape is not fair to the blind, nor the most dulcet music harmonious to the deaf. If you like not Goldsmith’s poems and must need volunteer the confession, have the grace at least to be ashamed of your incapacity.’

‘’Tis said about the town, sir,’ Boswell answered, with obsequious flattery, ‘that he borrowed all the more exquisite lines in “The Traveller” from you.’

‘’Tis said falsely, then. Half a dozen lines only in the poem are of my suggestion. I do not say they were the best lines nor yet the worst. But, at least, I can number them on my fingers with the thumbs to spare. To retail slander is only a degree less disgraceful than to devise it. Sir, there are only two subjects on which you can speak without malice—me and yourself—and I am sick of them both.’

The reproof glanced off Boswell’s oily self-conceit like water off a water-fowl. Yet something plainly troubled him. He fidgeted and fumbled when he spoke again quite unlike his own pert self.

‘Yet, sir,’ he stammered, ‘there is another of whom often I would fain speak to you. ’Tis a lady whom I——’

‘A lady, sir!’ cried Johnson in surprise. ‘Do I understand you allude to a lady to whom your affections are honourably engaged?’ Then, curiosity superseding surprise: ‘Tell me of her, sir—of her family, of her fortune, of her appearance, but, first essential, of her character. And yet I err to expect discriminating judgment from the partiality of affection.’

‘’Tis the lady that was spoken of just now—Mistress Caroline Langtry, a gentle and virtuous maid, whom Roderick O’Connor’s tale has wronged most grievously.’

‘In Heaven’s name, sir, how know you of this business?’

‘From her own lips, sir. The disappointed lover has twisted the story to his own thinking.’

‘If that be so, what cowardice held you back from plain speaking while he was still here to hearken and judge?’

‘Because she bade me, under pressure of a promise, to speak only to you.’

‘To me?’

‘Whom she reveres as I do.’

‘Why, sir, what can the wench know of me?’

‘From public reputation, sir, and from my commendation.’

‘Ay,’ said the master, with an indulgent smile, ‘you have been constant enough in my praises; I dare aver you have told her naught to my disparagement neither. Well, well, Bozzy, I will not quarrel with my well-wishers. But judgment is often blinded by affection. This matter claims discern-

ment and discretion. The story of O'Connor had much cogency.'

'I aver she has made everything plain to me, sir,' Boswell protested. 'She would not stoop to reason with a petulant and impertinent boy. But she bears him no malice for his violence. She has drawn an oath from her stout cousin Jenkins that he will not hurt the lad. It will be no more than a crossing of weapons and parting.'

'This will be pleasant tidings for poor Goldy,' Johnson cried good-naturedly, 'who loves the lad out of all fashion, and is even now breaking his simple honest heart about his presupposed peril. Goldy, I say—Goldie!'

'You would not break a lady's confidence, sir?' interrupted Boswell.

'The suggestion implies an insult,' cried Johnson angrily, 'and yet would I strain punctilious etiquette to ease the overcharged heart of a friend. Goldy,' he added affectionately, as Goldsmith showed himself at the chamber door, 'you have no cause for perturbation. The old game-cock will not kill your young bantam. Boswell here vouches there is no danger on most excellent authority, and he, as you know, goes everywhere and hears everything. The fellow Jenkins means but to disarm him and let him go.'

'Pray God it may be so!' said Goldsmith fervently, 'for I love the boy like a son.'

CHAPTER V

WITHIN AN INCH OF HIS LIFE

‘ I’ll potch at him some way,
Or wrath or craft may get him.

THERE was a faint roseate flush in the eastern sky, a slight sting of frost in the brisk morning air, when Roderick O’Connor called next morning at Dr. Goldsmith’s chambers in the Temple. The doctor bustled about excitedly with an overacted cheerfulness. Boswell’s assurance had abated his fear, not removed it. He had known and loved his young companion from a boy, and was nervous as a mother at the thought of his danger. More than once he was tempted to tell him what he had heard, but, doubting how he would take it, forbore.

O’Connor was quiet, silent, and very pale. His love had been half himself, and the blow that killed it stunned him. The savour was gone out of his life, as in the folly of his youth he believed, never to return. He had no fear because he had no hope—nothing but a dull longing to strike the man that wronged him. He drank a little of the coffee Goldsmith pressed upon him, but would touch no food. Restless and eager to be gone, he fumbled

with his hat and fidgeted in his chair till Goldsmith yielding to his impatience, presently the two were jolting in a hackney carriage through the half-awakened streets of London.

They were first on the ground, a good twenty minutes before their time, and waited under the trees close to the Serpentine. It was a glorious morning in early October, whose pet days neither spring nor summer can rival. The air was wonderfully fresh and fine, and so clear that the trees still in full leaf, though touched here and there with yellow and red, showed every leaf and twig etched in clean outline. The roofs and towers in the distance stood vividly out against the pale blue of the clear sky. The sky brightened more and more, and shone rosily in the calm waters of the Serpentine that fell away in ripples from the breasts of the lazily-moving waterfowl. Then the red edge of the sun showed over the horizon, and the whole scene was alight. The soul of the poet expanded with the beauty of the scene, and even the disconsolate lover felt its cheery influence. The face of death was grim and repugnant to such loveliness, and there came upon him suddenly, as a sprinkle of cold water on a sleeper's face, the fear that this was his last look upon earth or sky.

The chill thought made him shiver. At that moment, and as though to match his thoughts, two black figures casting long shadows came striding rapidly towards them over the vivid greensward through the trees, whose leaves were all aglow with the slanting rays of the morning sun.

Jenkins' second, Captain Coolaghan, accosted Goldsmith gravely, while the two principals stood silently apart. A square-built man was the captain, with arms extraordinarily long and shoulders extraordinarily broad. His round face was fringed with reddish whiskers, his nose was a pugnacious snub, but his light blue eyes were innocent as a child's.

Very gaudy was his costume, the body-coat and breeches of rich crimson velvet, the silk waistcoat plentifully sprigged with rosebuds. But there were stains on the waistcoat, and the breeches were darned at the knees, and the coat at the elbows. Under his arm he carried two rapiers in plain leather scabbards.

'Dr. Goldsmith, I presume?' said the captain.

Goldsmith bowed.

The captain extended a broad strong fist cordially.

'As an Irishman, sir, I'm glad to meet you. Sure, I'm a Roscommon man myself, and you're a credit to the country. I have read your "Deserted Village," sir, till there isn't a leaf of it hangs together; bedad, I've near read the print off the pages. Faith, I'm very pleased to meet you in a friendly way like this, and I hope this little affair will be the means of our better acquaintance. Maybe you wouldn't mind choosing a sword for your friend. The sooner we begin the business the sooner it'll be over.'

Goldsmith laid his hand indifferently on one of the two hilts held towards him. In some vague way the genial kindness of the captain comforted him. He could not fancy it the prelude to a tragedy.

Sword in hand, the two principals fronted each other on a strip of smooth sward screened from view by the trees, and edged by the river.

Anthony Jenkins was dressed as for a feast. His big body was cased in a loose scarlet body-coat, rich yellow knee-breeches, and white silk stockings. His coarse, harsh face wore a look of savage self-confidence that belied the encouraging message of Boswell. Roderick was black as Hamlet in the play, but for a touch of white at his breast and sleeves. His face was white as the lace of his dress, white, rigid, and handsome as the marble face of a Greek statue.

As the naked steel flashed in the morning light a sudden gust of anger, a sudden lust of fighting, caught the doctor. The moral censor of duels turned sharply on the unoffending Captain Coolaghan.

‘Draw,’ he said, ‘if you carry your sword for use, not show. It were a shame in us to stand gaping idly while our friends fight.’

But Captain Coolaghan was not to be provoked.

‘No, no,’ he said soothingly, ‘the pen is your weapon, doctor, not the sword. I know half your verses by heart. I’ll not rob the world of the hope of more. I’m damned if I lift steel against you. Let them go their own way, and fight their own fight, without help from you or I.’

Clash! the two swords met rudely and parted. Clash and rasp! a fierce, unskilful thrust by O’Connor, a quick parry by Jenkins, another and another; the boy was mad with anger.

An evil smile twitches the thick lips of the burly

swashbuckler, for he knows himself master of his foe's life. Yet he plays with him doggedly that the fight may not seem a murder when the end comes, and puts aside the wild thrusts with no attempt to repay them.

The seconds watched the fight with an interest keen as the combatants. As steel clashed and glanced too swift almost for eye to follow, Goldsmith found comfort in Jenkins' swordplay—quick, quiet, and confident.

'Boswell was right,' he thought; 'he only waits his chance to disarm the reckless boy.'

But the cunning captain knew his Jenkins better. He read murder in that evil smile. He saw the skilled swordsman was playing with the lad, that he could end the combat when he chose, and he guessed how he meant to end it.

Yet it came near to quite another ending than the Mohock purposed. O'Connor, though with little knowledge of his weapon, was lithe, strong, active, and untiring as a young leopard. With quick eye and limber wrist he sent his sword-point again and again straight tilt at his opponent's breast, to be touched aside right or left with a firm parade. Confident skill begot carelessness. Roderick slid in a lightning thrust, the parry was a shade too late. The keen point but half diverted ripped the silk of Jenkins' shirt, and raised the skin, and drew the blood. The sting of pain begot a sudden savage anger in him, and he awoke at once to vigorous action. Another reckless thrust from Roderick, and his chance had come. He parried the unskilful lunge so sharply

that he wrenched the blade from the youngster's hand, and even as it fell he sent his own point in full at the defenceless breast with the whole force of his weight and strength behind the thrust. The point struck and pierced, till the hilt smote O'Connor's breast so hard that it sent him crashing to the ground, leaving the dripping blade free in its master's hand. There was no touch of compunction in the murderer's face as he stood looking down on the writhing body of his victim.

'You are witness, Captain Coolaghan; you, too, are witness, Dr. Goldsmith, that he met his fate in fair fight.'

'I am witness 'twas foul murder,' cried Goldsmith fiercely. 'Your trick of fence has helped you to kill the boy. But if you dare face a man——'

He tugged at the hilt of his long sword, but Captain Coolaghan uncouthly but kindly stepped between them.

'Begging your pardon, doctor,' he cried, 'that will not help now, and I misdoubt that you know more of the fence yourself than your young friend.'

Then he turned in anger on his own principal.

'Toney Jenkins,' he cried, 'you are a rogue and a coward. You have foully slain the poor unskilled lad. You swore to me your purpose was but to disarm him.'

'He drew first blood. My own life was in danger,' retorted Jenkins.

'You lie! His hand and sword-hilt had parted when you thrust. But that it were against all the

rules of the game that second should fight his principal, I would have a turn with you myself. But go your way to the devil, and save that thick neck of yours as best you can from the hangman's knot. I will stay here with the doctor and the poor boy's body, chance what may.

Jenkins strode off sullenly yet swiftly, and vanished through the trees, and the honest Irishman turned to help the doctor to carry the body to a hackney-coach. But Goldsmith was already down beside the prostrate boy. He unbuttoned the coat, and drew the silk shirt, already sticky with the oozing blood, clear of the wound. He gave a great cry of delight as he looked. The deadly-meant thrust, by great good luck, had struck and glanced from one of the ribs on the left side. It had pierced and ripped the flesh with an ugly red gash, from which the blood welled. But the doctor's quick eye told him instantly this was no fatal wound.

'Is he dead?' said the Irishman, bending down to look.

'No, nor like to be,' returned the doctor joyfully, 'small thanks to the villian that stabbed. The point glanced and missed his heart. He has but fainted from pain and loss of blood. Lend a hand, good friend, lest he bleed to death.'

They tore his shirt in strips for bandages eked out with their own handkerchiefs. The doctor tied the warm lips of the wound where the steel had ripped the flesh together, and bound it tightly with skilful hand, to heal, as he hoped, at the first intention. The captain took a huge flask from his pocket, and

would have forced a few drops of the brandy through the tight-clenched teeth, but the doctor interposed.

‘Better as he is,’ he whispered; ‘we will get him home more quietly, and with less pain, unconscious. Take him, you, under the arms—so, gently, gently, and we will carry him together to the hackney-coach that is in waiting.’

The tough, sinewy Irishman and the squat, square-built, muscular doctor made nothing of the weight. The poor lad groaned once or twice during the rattling journey over the rough London pavement in the hackney-coach, but he did not regain full consciousness till after he was laid in bed in his own chamber with the kindly landlady, with whom he was a special favourite, weeping over him.

‘My dearest Caroline,’ were the first words that came in a low murmur from his pale lips. Then remembrance went swiftly on through all that had chanced during the week, from her falsehood to the fight and fall, and he shivered and groaned.

‘Does your wound smart?’ Goldsmith asked anxiously.

‘My wound?’ he asked eagerly. ‘Nay, I knew not I was wounded. Am I hurt? Am I like to die?’ There was longing, not fear, in his face.

‘You are in God’s hands, dear boy,’ the doctor answered soothingly. ‘Not what we wish, but what He sends, is best for us. Now you must sleep. ’Tis nature’s kindest nurse, the best medicine to heal the hurts of mind and body. Come, captain!’

‘At the street-door the captain would have

parted from Goldsmith, but the doctor would not have it so.

‘You must bear me hard, doctor,’ the honest fellow protested, ‘as partaker in the poor boy’s injury, as the companion of that cursed Mohock Jenkins.’

‘Nay, captain,’ said the doctor, ‘I am glad to find a friend where I feared an enemy. On the altar of friendship there is no offering as meet as good wine. You will crack a bottle at my lodgings before we part.’

Late that night the two strangely-assorted friends were still together at the poet’s lodgings. Three empty Madeira bottles stood on the table between them.

Goldsmith lay on a battered sofa with the back of his wig to the front and one boot off, for he had hurt his great-toe in the attempt to show the captain how he could jump over the poker held between his hands. But his homely face beamed with the kindest good-humour as the captain, more solemn and more sober than he had been in the morning, though two of the three bottles had gone down his throat, recited in a rich Irish brogue the lines :

‘The broken soldier kindly pressed to stay
Sat by his fire and talked the night away,
Wept o’er his wounds and tale of sorrows done,
Shouldered his crutch and showed how fields were won.’

CHAPTER VI

THE POET'S FIRST LOVE

‘Now have I found this saw aright,
Who ever loved but loved not at first sight?’

ADVENTURES, like misfortunes, never come alone. Two nights later Goldsmith, having dined with Sir Joshua Reynolds, left the company early, despite the sly taunts of David Garrick, saying he meant to look in on his young friend in his lodgings.

‘That bloom-coloured suit, doctor, is not worn for mere masculine admiration,’ cried Garrick. ‘’Twill charm some lady’s eyes ere morning. You go to meet your mistress, I warrant. I give the toast of the doctor’s mistress, though she carry him from our company.’

Then Goldsmith laughingly joined the toast to ‘The fair unknown.’ Nor he nor Garrick guessed how true the jest was like to prove.

Roderick O’Connor was so feverish, so sick in mind and body, that the kindly doctor tarried long at his bedside, and it was near midnight when he set out for home. As he strolled slowly by the Haymarket Theatre, even in the dim light of the sparse oil-lamps, his bloom-coloured suit gleamed

gorgeously amid the dingy night-birds. There were, it seemed, none abroad in the streets but swaggering Mohocks and women of pleasure. But though Goldsmith walked quickly, a light figure of a girl, slim, dapper, neatly but very plainly clad, with veil drawn closely, went by him down the lane and out into the Strand.

He had hardly time to note her figure with a thrill of sympathy for a timid young girl alone in the streets of London at such an hour, when two men on the other side of the way started in quick pursuit, laughing as they ran. He, too, moved more quickly in the same direction. At the corner of the lane he saw that they had caught up with the girl. She was still walking. But the two gallants hovered around her obstructively. Goldsmith tucked his long sword under his arm clear of the pavement and broke into a run.

As he drew closer he could hear the two Mohocks pester the poor girl with impudent compliments, while she walked resolutely on without answering.

'A trim ankle promises a pretty face, mistress,' cried one.

'Your veil was ever a kill-joy,' cried the other. 'It robs love of its pleasure and beauty of its praise.'

'Nay, 'tis like a dull cover on a dainty dish—there is neither seeing nor tasting till it be removed.'

With that one of them caught her arm and snatched at the veil. She dealt him such a stinging slap on the cheek that the smack of it was like a pistol-shot in the silent street. He fell back with a curse, while his companion made a dash at

her from the other side. But at that moment Goldsmith came running up breathless, and thrust his squat figure between the girl and her assailants.

‘Halloa!’ cried one, who seemed to be the ring-leader, ‘we have here a droll squire of dames.’

‘Nay,’ cried the other, with a glance at the gay coat and long sword, ‘’tis but a rare flame-coloured butterfly with a pin thrust through.’

‘Say, rather, a stinging bee,’ said Goldsmith, ‘with sting ready, as you shall find.’

His hand dropped on his sword-hilt. One of the two stooped and caught at the sheathed sword to wrench it from his side. But Goldsmith was too quick for him, and a dexterous push and trip, learned on the distant plains of Roscommon, sent the fellow headlong into the gutter. Then the doctor’s sword flashed out. The second Mohock was but a poor fencer, and at the third pass Goldsmith’s blade went through his shoulder. Meanwhile his companion had picked himself from the kennel, and, muttering curses, the two night-birds slunk away into the darkness.

The girl had fled swiftly a few paces at first, then paused and came slowly back and stood anxiously by for the few seconds while the steel clashed.

As her two assailants limped off together she turned to her champion with a timid touch of a small hand on the sleeve of the bloom-coloured coat, and a sweetly murmured ‘Thank you, sir. Oh, I was so frightened!’

The voice was very low and clear, with just a faint, sweet flavour of the brogue that charmed

his Irish ears. He made a splendid bow, almost brushing the pavement with the sweep of his three-cornered hat.

‘A trifling service, madam,’ he cried, ‘that repays itself tenfold in the doing. But your thanks embolden me to request I may be allowed to see you to your home.’

‘You add kindness to kindness,’ she said. ‘I will be most grateful for your protection.’

From utter courtesy he would have fallen a few paces respectfully behind her, but with a light touch on his sleeve and a beseeching word she kept him at her side.

‘I will feel safer,’ she said.

Her voice was so very pleasant as she said it that he, in his turn, was tempted to quarrel with the veil.

But his patience and curiosity were put to no long trial. A hundred yards on she turned down a side-street off the Strand and fitted a doorkey to the door of a house.

With a respectful bow Goldsmith would have parted, but she would not have it so.

‘Pray come in, sir,’ she said, a frank entreaty in her sweet voice there was no resisting, ‘and let my mother add her thanks to mine. Mother is blind,’ she whispered back to him over her shoulder, as she led the way lightly up the dark stairway to the second floor.

When she turned the handle to let him pass through Goldsmith’s eyes were so dazzled coming suddenly from darkness into light that at first he could distinguish nothing clearly in the room.

‘Welcome, my darling!’ a voice cried. ‘I was frightened you were very late;’ and Goldsmith knew from whom the daughter had her winning sweetness of voice.

He could vaguely see at the far end of the pretty, tasteful room an old lady in a deep, high-backed armchair, her thin white hand raised and her face turned to the door.

‘But who is with you, Nellie?’ the voice cried again. ‘I hear another step—a man’s step.’

‘’Tis a gentleman, mother, who saved me from a great danger and protected me at his own life’s risk. I have entreated him to drink a dish of tea with us.’

‘Surely he is most welcome, Nell,’ said the mother, rising from her chair and stretching a groping hand towards Goldsmith. ‘He has a poor mother’s fervent thanks for his kindness to her darling.’

At this Goldsmith came shyly forward and took the thin white hand in his and kissed it respectfully, as courtier might a queen’s.

He saw a tall, slight old lady, white-haired, wrinkled, and old, yet wonderfully handsome—the very embodiment of the word gentlewoman. She was dressed in black, with a deep yellow lace collar clasped with a small old-fashioned brooch at her throat.

‘Will you be pleased to sit here, sir?’ a second voice said, like an echo of the first.

He started and turned sharply round, and instantly his admiration of the mother was lost in admiration of the daughter. She had thrown aside

her cloak and bonnet and veil, and he saw that lovely face for the first time. Nor was it mere beauty that made it so lovely. It was one of those rare faces that, beautiful or plain, do the heart good to gaze on. The clear blue eyes, the sweet lips just parted by a smile, the dimples that came and went on the soft cheeks in fairy touches of light and shadow, were all full of the pure joy of life. The soft hair of ruddy brown was pushed back from the low forehead, though one little rebellious curl refused to keep its place.

She had set an easy-chair to the fire opposite to where her mother sat, and, with her hands on the elbows, prettily invited him to be seated.

‘I will have the tea ready in a moment,’ she said.

Quick, deft, and neat-handed, she flitted from the inlaid tea-caddy on the table to the singing kettle on the hob, and the awkward, homely man looked on with delight seeing her so sweet and serviceable.

His simple, undisguised admiration of the daughter captured the mother’s heart, and in a moment or two they were chatting together like old friends, and, with a woman’s facile confidence, she told him the story of her life.

She had been an actress, she told him, speaking in a low, clear voice, that did not reach beyond his ears; an Irish girl that had won her way on the stage. Her maiden name—Julia Neville—was instantly familiar to Goldsmith as famous before his coming to London. She had been tempted from the stage to marry an English gentleman of fortune.

Only a faint quiver in her quiet voice told what her married life had been. His fortune had been dissipated before he died, and he left her and her only daughter almost destitute. Some slight salvage indeed she had gathered from the wreck—some odds and ends of furniture and stray knick-knacks saved from the sale—made their humble London lodgings look like home.

But their income was small—how small she did not say, nor Goldsmith guess—and poverty, if it did not cross the threshold, often looked in at the window.

For a little while the mother thought of returning to the stage; but in the misery of her married life she had grown old and feeble before her time. Her sight was failing when her husband died, and three months after his death it wholly failed. A little later, to her surprise, her daughter, whom she had looked on as a child, showed a sudden genius and passion for the stage.

‘What little talent I ever had,’ the mother said very softly, that the busy daughter might not hear, ‘is hers a hundredfold. She has had no training except that I used sometimes to rehearse my former triumphs for her amusement. Yet one morning, about a year ago, she almost frightened me with that passage from “Ophelia,” “Oh, what a noble mind is here cast down!” I never spoke it like her, I never heard it spoken like her! The music of the lines was perfect, the passionate sadness heart-breaking. When she ceased my poor blind eyes were full of tears.

‘For the moment, sir, I was thinking only of Ophelia ; I had forgotten it was my daughter that spoke. Of course, I cannot see her movements or expression. I know her face only from memory, but I remember it was very beautiful. Still one feels her heart speak in her voice. She has the sympathy that can make her forget herself for another—the great secret of the great actress.

‘But I weary you,’ she said, ‘with the gossip of a mother fond and foolish.’

Goldsmith begged her to continue.

‘Your daughter went upon the stage?’

‘For about a year she has played small parts at the Haymarket for small payment. Latterly she has had better offers elsewhere, but she loves to watch and listen to Mr. Garrick. Besides, his theatre is but a stone’s-throw from our lodgings, and she has never been molested in her going and coming till to-night. Forgive me, sir ; I cannot tell why I have wearied you with this tiresome tale. But I am a foolish, garrulous old woman, who am proud of my daughter, and love to speak of her, and seldom get the chance of other ears than my own to listen. I feared, too, that, not knowing her story, you might think it strange that she should be abroad so late and unprotected.’

By this time the tea was made and the table set, and the pleasant meal cut short the mother’s tale.

Poor Goldsmith thought he had never tasted tea so fragrant as that the young girl poured for him into the pretty begilt and beflowered porcelain cup, for there seemed a kindly welcome even in the

pouring. Everything she said or did was pleasant to him, but her manner to her mother pleased him most. The daughter, constantly remembering the mother's blindness, taught her to almost forget it. Those bright eyes were so quick to see for her, those ready hands so deft to serve, that kindly heart so skilled to guess her unspoken wish, that the daughter's love made light the privation of the mother.

The girl had a merry humour of her own, and diverted them with the day's doings at the theatre. A big rough man, she said, had come that day to the green-room, a strange, ugly man, with curious twitchings of his arms and legs, a great shaggy bear of a man who had written a solemn play, and he had ogled the ladies and rated the men and called the great Mr. Garrick a jackanapes to his face.

'His name was—i'faith, I have forgotten his name! but he was like this.'

By some inimitable and indescribable trick of mimicry the lovely face suggested uncouth ugliness, and the graceful figure clumsy awkwardness. The resemblance to the man himself was unmistakable.

'His name is Sam Johnson,' Goldsmith instantly interposed. 'He is Garrick's chief friend and mine.'

'I crave your pardon,' cried the girl, with a penitent blush. 'I did not know.'

'The fault was mine, if any fault there was. But there is little harm done. Your "old bear" is the kindest of men. He is a bear in nothing but the

skin, and would be the first to laugh at your merry prattle.'

'But you, sir,' she cried, with impulsive curiosity, 'who know him so well, who——'

She blushed again, and broke off in confusion. She had almost asked her guest's name.

Goldsmith smiled indulgently at her eager curiosity, and promptly answered the question she scrupled to ask.

'My name is Goldsmith,' he said.

'Goldsmith!' cried mother and daughter together in great surprise.

'Are you akin to the great poet, Oliver Goldsmith?' the mother asked, after a little pause.

He looked from one eager face to the other with quick suspicion, for he was used to jests and jibes from Garrick and from Bouclerk. Even that fawning spaniel Boswell felt privileged to yelp at him.

But in those women's faces was simple sincerity. The girl's eyes sparkled with excitement and their bright glances warmed the poet's heart with the thought that this innocent admiration was for him.

'Nay, I know not of his greatness nor of his poetry,' he answered lightly, though his honest, homely face blushed as he spoke, 'but of a surety I am no other than Oliver Goldsmith, at your service.'

The young girl was abashed at the announcement, as one might be who had come into a king's presence unawares. Her eyelids drooped and her bodice rose and fell with the quick movement of her bosom.

The mother spoke first, with old-fashioned courtesy.

‘Sir, my daughter and I have long loved your poems. It is our pleasure and pride to have the author even one hour our guest.’

‘I am ashamed to have been a trouble to you,’ the girl murmured. ‘I would never have dared ask your company if I had known.’

‘Then I should have missed much pleasure,’ Goldsmith answered beamingly.

Was there ever poet that did not love praise, though some have the art to hide it? Poor Goldsmith had no such art. What praise is so pleasant to the poet as that which shines in the bright eyes of a beautiful girl?

‘It seems too wonderful to be true!’ she said, after a pause.

‘Indeed, indeed, I’m no wonder!’ quoth honest Goldsmith. ‘You but mock me with such praise.’

But he did not think so, though he said it. He believed her in earnest and loved to believe it.

‘Let this speak for me,’ cried the girl gaily. ‘You will not doubt your own children’s testimony.’ She set two brightly-bound little volumes before him with their names conspicuous in gold lettering on the back—‘The Traveller’ and ‘The Deserted Village.’ ‘I read a little of one or the other for mother every night when I come from the theatre.’

‘Read for me to-night,’ Goldsmith entreated.

‘Nay, we have the poet himself to-night,’ she answered, with a look that thrilled him through and through.

‘Nay, Nellie,’ cried the mother, ‘read for him

if he desire it. 'Tis but a poor return for the pleasure he has given us.'

She was anxious that Goldsmith should hear her daughter read, and justify her praise.

'Which shall it be?' Nellie said, offering him the two books to choose from. 'I am so glad,' she cried, when he had chosen; 'tis our favourite too.'

She turned the pages, found her place, and read:

'At church, with meek and inoffensive grace,
His looks adorned the venerable place;
Truth from his lips prevailed with double sway,
And fools who came to scoff remained to pray.
The service past, around the pious man
With steady zeal each honest rustic ran;
E'en children followed with endearing wile,
And plucked his gown to share the good man's smile.
To them his heart, his love, his griefs were given,
But all his serious thoughts had rest in Heaven.
As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form
Swells from the vale and midway leaves the storm,
Though round his breast the rolling clouds are spread,
Eternal sunshine settled on his head.'

Her voice and heart were in close sympathy with the poet's. The flowing and varied music of the lines, their exquisite grace and tenderness, found a perfect interpretation. When she ended the tears of delight stood in Goldsmith's eyes.

'I thank you,' he said simply. 'You have shown me my own heart. I never knew I was a poet before.'

'Sing for him, Nellie,' cried the exultant mother.

'Nay, mother; that were to try his patience too far.'

‘ But that ’twould seem extortionate, I would entreat you,’ he said.

‘ Indeed, indeed, ’tis not worth denying,’ the girl answered, ‘ and I could deny you nothing.’

With one quick glance, half timid, half sly, at the poet, she struck up the ballad of ‘ Madam Blaize ’:

“ Good people all with one accord
Lament for Madame Blaize,
Who never wanted a good word
From those who spoke her praise.”

Goldsmith hummed the words delightedly under his breath with frank applause.

‘ Bravo ! bravo !’ he cried. ‘ Charming! sung !’

‘ And a charming song,’ she retorted audaciously.

She was more at her ease now, as she found the simple man behind the poet.

‘ I won’t say no when you sing it. May I come some day and play your accompaniment on the flute ?’

‘ When you please,’ the mother answered courteously. ‘ You will be always welcome.’

Nellie’s bright eyes looked a still warmer invitation.

With their warmth still in his heart he took his leave.

Poor Goldsmith felt strangely lonely that night, when, fresh from his peep into a happy home, he came back to his untidy and desolate chambers. He drew a bottle of Madeira and glass to him and pulled the cork out with his teeth. Then, with a sudden impulse, changed his mind, rammed the cork back almost angrily into the bottle, and sitting

to his table, wrote steadily for an hour at a story which the world now knows as 'The Vicar of Wakefield.' When he had finished the chapter he read over again the passage that describes the gentle, loving, and sprightly Sophia.

'She's Sophia,' he said, smiling. 'I don't wonder the Vicar loved Sophia best of his daughters.'

CHAPTER VII

THE LITERARY CLUB

‘Day and night did we keep company.’

YOUNG Roderick O’Connor grew rapidly well of his hurt. Thanks to the doctor’s quick and skilful bandaging, the wound healed on the first intention. Vigorous youth, untainted by vice or dissipation, did the rest. In a week he was out of danger; in three he was on his feet again. But the soul’s wounds do not heal as quickly as the body’s. Roderick had been wounded in his faith and love. He was no longer the simple youth by whom a woman was to be served and worshipped as a goddess, for whose sweet and innocent sake a man is bound to keep his heart unspotted from the world.

It was a new Roderick that rose from that bed of weakness and of pain to which he had been brought for a false woman’s sake. The shy and modest, studious youth had grown on a sudden a wild and reckless roysterer. His books were flung aside for the cards, the dice, the wine-flask, and the sword.

Handsome and daring, light of love and quick of quarrel, the men learned to fear him, and the women,

it is to be feared, to favour him all the more for his reputed wildness. He laboured so hard in his vocation that in a few months his reputation was well established. The fencing school, the theatre, and the gambling hell were his favourite haunts. He had already been twice out, and each time had wounded his man. More than one woman's name was coupled idly with his, and his moderate patrimony from his father was slipping rapidly from his hands across the gaming-table.

Poor Goldsmith remonstrated strongly but vainly. To him the young man was always affectionate, always respectful, but absolutely reckless. He never even promised reform.

'I have been a milksop,' he cried, with the cheap cynicism of disappointed youth, which thinks the whole world dark when its own eyes are closed; 'I met a milksop's fate. Now I am a man I will live a man's life, and pay the world for its counterfeit pleasures in its own counterfeit coin.'

So Goldsmith perforce let the wilful youth run his wilful course, trusting to the teaching of time, experience, and his own good heart for his ultimate reform. It is possible he often thought so afterwards—that he was less earnest than he might have been because his own life was otherwise absorbed.

He went often to the house of the blind mother and the fair daughter, and found himself more welcome at each succeeding visit. With the reverence for the poet which those gentle devotees never lost there blended more and more the tender, familiar affection of the friend.

His chair always waited for him at their table or their hearth, and his favourite flute hung in ribbons from the mantelpiece. It was their hostage, Nellie sportively declared, for his coming. If he but stayed a week away, she swore she would emulate the bandits disappointed of their ransom, and break and burn it joint by joint.

To Goldsmith those pleasant evenings were the first glimpse of home he had known since he had left the family vicarage in far-away Ireland, to live his life, 'remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow,' lonely alike in drudgery or in dissipation in London.

His whole being brightened and quickened under the enlivening influence of love. Vague hopes and longings blossomed in his heart as he sat in that happy home where he was ever welcome, or in his desolate chamber alone with his own thoughts.

Nature had fashioned him for those gentle, simple domestic joys of which his poetry so sweetly tells. He loved all women and children, and was ever happy in their company. For wife and children of his own his heart had a reserve of unutterable tenderness. Of all men living he had most need of such stay and comfort. Sensitive, he needed sympathy; reckless and extravagant, he needed thrift and order; wholly unselfish, he longed for someone to love.

His hopes and longings, but vague at first, took clearer shape as the days went by. The poet's imagination fashioned the happy future for him. In her presence he dreamt of a wife by his side, a well-ordered home, and children at his knee, and

woke with a start in the littered loneliness of his chambers.

The young girl, meanwhile, was enveloped in the glamour of poesy, which blinded her to all thoughts of love. She had known and loved the poet in 'The Traveller,' in 'The Deserted Village,' before she had met the man, and she loved and cherished the man at first for the sake of the poet more than for his own. She had the wit to find the real Goldsmith behind the ungainly figure and homely face. His gentle heart, his thoughts by turn lofty, tender, playful, his vivid words that made his thoughts alive—all these charmed her with a charm that was not yet love, but that might easily grow to love.

Goldsmith had spoken of her to Garrick, who had, as usual, first laughed at him and humoured him. It was at a full meeting of the famous club that Goldsmith told the story of his night's adventures amid a chorus of good-humoured amusement.

'Poor old Goldy grown a squire of dames! What next, I wonder?' cried the pert voice of Boswell.

'Why not?' sneered the courtly Beauclerk. 'The troubadour was ever a warrior in the old days. With goose-quill, flute, and rapier our Goldy is fully equipped for combat and for love.'

'Chivalry,' cried Edmund Burke, with affectionate warmth, 'belongs to no age. The man who is true of speech and kind of heart, who is brave with men and gentle to women, is ever of the order.'

'Where dwells your goddess, Goldy,' sneered Beauclerk, ignoring Burke's rebuke, 'if mortals less

favoured and less chivalrous may claim to look upon her ?’

‘ Sir !’ thundered Dr. Johnson, ‘ your speech is unworthy of yourself and our company. You seldom open your mouth but with the intention to give pain, and you often give me pain, not from the power of what you say, but seeing your intention. To laugh at courage and kindness is to confess to meanness.’

‘ But surely, sir, laughter is pardonable amongst friends ?’ interposed Boswell.

‘ Sir,’ said Dr. Johnson, ‘ let it suffice that I have not reprovèd you. A goose may hiss at his superiors without reproach, but, then, Beau is not a goose.’

‘ That distinction, at least, is something to be thankful for, doctor,’ Beauclerk interposed, with a comical look, half glad, half rueful, of a schoolboy unhorsed after his flogging.

‘ It depends, sir, on how the privilege is used. Sir, let me prescribe for you less wit and more feeling.’

‘ Nay,’ said good-natured Goldsmith, ‘ there is no offence given where there is none taken.’

Johnson rolled himself in his chair, big with a crushing rejoinder to this kindly sophistry.

But before he could deliver himself of his thunder-bolt Garrick interposed :

‘ Let Goldsmith play knight-errant if he choose. But surely I may decline the partnership with him. I have no talent that way. I am a mere money-grubbing theatre manager.’

‘ But, Davy, the advantage will be yours,’ said

Goldsmith, with eager simplicity. 'She will make the fortune of your theatre.'

'I prefer to make my own fortune,' Garrick retorted tartly. 'I have heard of the girl's mother as an actress, but reputation does not always imply genius.'

'Quite true, Davy,' whispered Beauclerk, who sat beside him, but under his breath, lest Johnson should hear. 'You should know that of your own knowledge.'

'Granting the mother's talent,' Garrick went on, stammering a little, for Beauclerk's arrow had wounded his self-conceit, 'that is no warranty for the daughter. Genius is not hereditary.'

'But I have heard her speak and read and sing,' cried Goldsmith enthusiastically. 'In all three she is perfect.'

'You are scarcely an expert,' retorted Garrick, 'even if your partiality did not disable your judgment. In the appreciation of this,' the highest of all arts, discernment and experience are to be desired.'

But Dr. Johnson's scant stock of patience was exhausted.

'Acting the highest of all arts !' he cried. 'Nay, sir, it is by many gradations the lowest. What is the actor at most but the author's lackey to prepare him for suitable appearance in public, though, like the lackey, he will sometimes try to put himself on the same level as the master. Strictly speaking, acting is not an art, but a trade. Its highest praise is that it gives voice and gesture to another

man's thoughts, which it too often mars in reproducing.'

'You are ever too hard on us actors, sir,' Garrick expostulated sulkily.

'Because the public are too generous. You have your triumphs piping hot, while the author can only hope for the uncertain and unsatisfactory plaudits of posterity. You are the ivy on the oak of literature, hiding the trunk that supports you. You monopolize the praise that is justly earned by the author. People regard more who acts the play than who wrote it. Even in the speciality of your own trade your failure is conspicuous. You appeal from nature to convention, you make sense subordinate to sound. Give you a new sentence to recite, and you turn the emphasis all awry.'

'Nay, sir, there you must pardon me,' cried the ruffled actor, 'if I disable your judgment. This is a thing that can be put to the test. Find you the sentence, and I will find the emphasis, and the company shall judge between us.'

'Repeat me, then, the eighth commandment,' cried Johnson.

'Dost need a prompter, Davy?' whispered again the tantalizing Beauclerk.

But Garrick rolled the words out smoothly in his matchless tones:

'“Thou *shalt* not bear false witness *against* thy neighbour.”'

'There!' cried Johnson, with triumphant laughter. 'He has wholly missed the meaning. The emphasis is on *not* and *false*. “Thou shalt *not* bear *false*

witness against thy neighbour" was the command that Moses published to the world. Come, come, Davy !' he cried, good-natured in his triumph, 'I own your special excellence. You made me laugh and cry in mine own despite, which no written words could do. You have given your figure and voice and soul to Hamlet, and made him live before our eyes as he lived in the mind of his creator. I but disparage actors in self-defence when they over praise themselves. What say you, boys ?' he went on, in a sudden burst of geniality. 'Shall we make a match to hear our Goldy's prodigy recite in Davy's green-room to-morrow ?'

'Content,' cried Garrick ; 'you shall all be welcome.'

There was a universal chorus of approval, in which Boswell's protest that it was beneath the dignity of men of letters to examine candidates for the stage was tumultuously overruled.

Honest Goldsmith was most eager of all.

'I give you a toast,' he cried, raising his glass of Madeira and half spilling it in his eagerness. 'Here's to your favourable judgment.'

'Sir,' cried Dr. Johnson, 'our approbation should only be challenged by desert. Here's to our discriminating judgment.'

'Content,' cried Goldsmith. ''Tis but a play upon the words. If the judgment is discriminating it must needs be favourable.'

CHAPTER VIII

A WELL-GRACED ACTRESS

‘ This player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion
Could force her soul to her own conceit,
That from its working all her visage warmed ;
Tears in her eyes, distraction in her aspect,
A broken voice, and her whole function suiting
With forms to her conceit.’

THAT night Goldsmith conveyed the good news to mother and daughter that Garrick himself would hear the young actress read on the morrow—Garrick ! who was to actors what Shakespeare was to poets—the supreme, unapproachable master ! The mother was confident and elated as at a success already secured ; the daughter delighted, but terrified at an awful ordeal to be endured. Never did she seem to Goldsmith more charming than in her pretty perplexity, her flutter of fears and hopes.

‘ What shall I read for him ? ’ she asked, as she turned the leaves of a book. ‘ “ Sweet Auburn ? ” I should love that best.’

There was a touch of innocent coquetry in her quick, shy glance as she said it at the face of the delighted author, who blushed with pleasure.

‘No, no,’ he stammered delightedly; ‘they would laugh at us both.’

‘Something from Shakespeare, Nellie,’ said the mother—‘Ophelia, or Juliet, or, best of all, Rosalind.’

‘Nay, madam,’ Goldsmith interposed; ‘our David monopolizes Shakespeare. He will have none trespass on that ground without his royal permit. Here,’ he went on, drawing a thin volume from the capacious pocket of his broad-skirted, bloom-coloured coat, ‘you must needs read from this, Mistress Nell, if you would thrive in your trial.’

She turned the pages poutingly, catching a line here and there.

‘“Irene, a Tragedy,”’ she murmured; ‘it seems but a dull piece.’

‘Read the name of the author, Mistress Malcontent.’

‘Dr. Samuel Johnson. Oh, is that it?’

‘Yes, that’s it. He is the supreme judge, the great Mogul from whose verdict there is no appeal. David is a baby in his grasp. He is indeed the rudest of men, and the most kind-hearted. Yet it is not for your own sake only I ask this. I want you to give my old friend something of the pleasure you gave myself when you first read my lines for me.’

‘May he prove as gentle a judge,’ she said, and the tears shone in her eyes.

For a moment the poet was tempted to tell his love. But conscience or cowardice whispered ‘Not now, while she thanks me for a kindness,’ so he but raised the warm white hand to his lips gratefully, and held his peace.

‘You must play Irene to-morrow,’ he said, laughing, ‘and none but Irene. For she is a proper woman, as solemn-faced a woman as you will meet on a summer’s day. And, by ’r lady, you must look to your accents and emphasis. You must speak by the book, for prevarication will undo you.’

Thereupon, with much laughter, he told them the story of Garrick and the eighth commandment till his careless prattle cheered, as it was meant to cheer, them both, and gave confidence to the young débutante.

‘Forewarned is forearmed,’ cried Nellie gaily. ‘Irene shall speak sad brow and true maid, yet precise in her terms and emphasis as a school-mistress. Now get you gone, that she and I may discourse together of the morrow.’

Some of the most famous members of the famous club were assembled early next morning in Garrick’s green-room. Johnson occupied the one easy-chair of the place, solemn as a judge, his great oak stick standing between his knees, his hands clasped one over the other on the top of it.

In the background the gentle Langton stood apart, lank and pensive, an anticipation of the æsthete of modern times. Topham Beauclerk in the foreground, alive, alert, tingling with worldliness to his finger-tips, waited curiously for Goldy’s ‘beauty and genius.’ Boswell buzzed about the place with the blundering, troublesome curiosity of a bluebottle fly.

Garrick, with a magisterial air that sat somewhat

incongruously upon his diminutive figure, stood in comical contrast close by ponderous Johnson.

‘Like a dapper poodle,’ Beauclerk whispered to Langton, ‘trying to emulate the gravity of a clumsy old St. Bernard.’

Reynolds and Burke had excused themselves on the grounds of deafness and business.

There was a murmur of surprised delight as Nellie Vaughan came quietly into the room leaning on Goldsmith’s arm.

Beauclerk alone made no sound or sign, but Nellie blushed, and her eyelids drooped as she found his ardent gaze of bold admiration on her face.

With a simple pride that was almost comical, Goldsmith introduced the girl to Johnson, and noted with pleasure that the Great Mogul called her ‘my dear’ very kindly, and held the little hand between both his own while he spoke to her.

Garrick, however, presently made it plain he was not satisfied that Johnson should seem to take the lead from him even in his own green-room.

‘Dr. Goldsmith,’ he said, a little formally, ‘you were anxious I should hear your young friend read that I might estimate her capacity for higher parts than those she has hitherto played in my theatre. I am exceedingly willing to gratify you in the matter. Is there any special piece she would choose? If not——’

He was about to graciously suggest Portia’s great speech, which he ever regarded as the supreme test of an actress, when Goldsmith interposed.

‘She has made her choice, Davy, with your good

leave.' Then, turning to her with something of dismay, he whispered: 'You have not brought the book.'

'I do not need the book,' she said; 'I'm a quick study.'

Garrick motioned her to a place about a dozen yards from where the party sat or stood attentive. He alone of the company wore a bored look. The expert is scornful of the enthusiasm of the amateur. He expected no more than pretentious mediocrity. He was already planning the courteous phrases, civil, but cold, in which he would excuse himself to Goldsmith. But he started into attention as the actress faced him. The girlish form seemed to dilate, the sweet face grew tense with passion. It was as we read in the old days: when the spirit entered into the priestess in the Delphic temple, the great actress was transformed into the part she played. Never before or since was Johnson's strained parody on Shakespeare's wondrous lines beginning,

'Aye but to die, to go we know not where,'

so wonderfully delivered. It was the distracted Irene herself that spoke.

"Oh, name not death: distraction and amazement,
Horror and agony are in that sound.
Let me but live, heap woes and woes upon me;
Hide me with murderers in the dungeon's gloom;
Send me to wander on some pathless shore;
Let shame and hooting infamy pursue me;
Let slavery harass and let hunger gripe."

At the first line Garrick's bored expression changed to frank amazement. He was quick to

recognise a past mistress of the art of which he was the greatest master the world has known. As the sonorous lines rolled on, their solemn cadence enlightened, enlivened, made terrible by the passion she breathed through every word, his admiration warmed to delight, and those that looked might see the changing emotions on her face reflected upon his.

The change in Johnson was not less remarkable. His judicial calm was suddenly perturbed. He alone recognised the lines, and started and glanced quickly, and half angrily, round at Goldsmith as if he feared some jest was meant. But the passionate earnestness of the girl speedily absorbed him. He found a music and a beauty and a passion in his lines he had not found before. With a wave of his hand and a swaying motion of his whole body, he beat time to the stately flow of the verse.

When the sweet voice ceased there was that dead silence which is the highest of all tributes to the actor's power. Johnson broke it.

'Bravo!' he cried. 'Friend Davy, you have found a rival.'

'I confess to a mistress, sir,' Garrick answered courteously.

'You might have saved my poor Irene from the malice of the pit, my dear,' Johnson added, 'if she had been fortunate enough to know you at the first: she might have even lived till now by your aid.'

'I fear me, doctor,' Garrick said, 'she was even too good for this world. Those whom the gods love die young.'

‘Faith, friend Davy,’ Johnson said, with a serio-comical sigh, ‘the gods of your Haymarket shrewdly dissembled their affection for my poor Irene.’

The handsome Beauclerk bowed with courtly deference to the actress.

‘Miss Vaughan,’ he said, ‘you have but whetted our appetite. Were you less charming we would be less greedy. May we mingle our thanks with petitions for fresh favours?’

‘’Tis friend Beau’s circumlocutory method, Miss Vaughan,’ said Johnson, ‘of entreating that you will recite for us again. In which request we are all his co-petitioners.’

‘With pleasure,’ she cried, excited, elated, yet half frightened by her triumph.

‘Shakespeare this time,’ whispered Goldsmith as she went by him to her place.

But she gave him a saucy, rebellious glance unseen by the others, and in a moment began the passage from the ‘Deserted Village’ with which she had won Goldsmith’s heart.

If she had charmed their ears even with the stately, ponderous lines of Johnson, her triumph now was overmastering. The sweet music of the lines, the simple, touching pathos of the thoughts, spoke straight from her heart to theirs. The touch of nature made them all akin. The burly philosopher, the keen-witted actor, the sentimental Langton, and the brilliant, worldly-minded Beauclerk all owned the charm, the poet himself most of all.

There was the suspicion of a tear on Johnson’s

cheek when she ended, and a strong feeling moved him to generous acknowledgment.

‘You have kept your best wine for the last, my dear. Our Goldsmith is a poet, which I shall never be. You have shown us both at our best, and I confess my master.’

‘But, sir——’ protested Boswell, aghast at this profaned self-depreciation of his idol.

‘I may not be humble with impunity while you are in company, friend Bozzy. If I take you for my looking-glass I will ever see here the figure of pride at full length.’

‘Sir,’ retorted Boswell pompously, ‘I shall be always glad to be used as the faithful mirror of your greatness.’

He was plainly pleased with the phrase, for he backed a little to the rear, drew a small notebook from his pocket, and scribbled in it.

Meanwhile Garrick had drawn the actress apart, and spoke to her earnestly.

‘Gentlemen,’ he said, after a moment or two, turning again to his company, ‘Miss Vaughan has kindly consented to play Juliet to my Romeo a fortnight hence. You will be all welcome on the first night.’

‘Fortunate Romeo,’ muttered Beauclerk under his breath, but not so low but Nellie heard him and blushed, and Goldsmith heard him and frowned.

CHAPTER IX

LIGHT-O'-LOVE

‘ Learn to win a lady’s faith,
Nobly as the thing is high,
Bravely as for life or death,
With a loyal constancy.’

JULIET took the town by storm.

All the coffee-houses babbled of the grace, the genius, the beauty of the new actress. She was the toast of every supper where the ‘bucks’ assembled. They swarmed to the theatre to see her play, to the replenishment of Garrick’s coffers. They buzzed about her behind the scenes, much to her own annoyance.

But Nellie could defend herself by sprightliness rather than by prudery. She answered the sentimental ogle with mocking laughter and the inane compliment with a merry jibe. Adorers grew shy of the rose whose thorns were so sharp. Thus she lightly puffed from her the flattering beaux with the keen breath of ridicule.

But there were two not so easily discouraged. Beauclerk had been attracted from the first, and Beauclerk was a man whose pursuit was ever

dangerous to woman or maid. He paid his court, as it were, between jest and earnest. He met her mocking with mocking, her laughter with laughter, and bided his time.

In answer to his friend Langton's censure and discouragement, he quoted confidently :

‘She is a woman, and therefore to be wooed ;
She is a woman, and therefore to be won.’

In Roderick O'Connor she had a still more devoted admirer. The poor boy—for he was still a boy in honest feeling, though he loved to pose as an empty-hearted, cynical man about town—had been completely captured the first night he saw her as Juliet. The remembrance of Caroline faded and vanished in the glowing light of her beauty. Her image filled his empty, aching heart, and charmed and warmed it. But a foolish pride restrained him from confessing love's conquest even to himself, much less to his gay companions. He who had laughed so boisterously at the follies and falsehood of woman, who styled them so scornfully the pretty playthings of men, now shamed to own that a woman had again subdued him to her worship. So he hid the ardent lover in the careless gallant, and fluttered with the other moths about her light, the brightest, the gayest of them all.

It so chanced that he and Beauclerk met their fate the same evening. Nellie was waiting at the wings of the theatre for her cue to go on as Juliet, dressed in a ball-dress of shimmering white satin, destitute of all colour or ornament save a knot of

blue ribbon at the white throat, and a wreath of white and red roses in her red-brown hair.

Beauclerk stood close behind, absolutely dazzled by her beauty. The pulses of his blood beat hot and fast as he slowly joined her at the wings. But he wore the easy, careless manner which was still his armour against rebuff.

‘Has Juliet no smile to spare for Romeo to-night?’ he asked as he took her hand and kissed it before she could recover it.

‘Juliet’s smiles are stage property,’ she answered, ‘purchased and prescribed by the manager.’

‘Then it was not to Juliet, but to Miss Vaughan, I should have made my entreaty. Her smiles are not yet purchased.’

‘Nor purchaseable,’ she answered coldly. ‘They are of no value but to the owner.’

Quick and apt, he capped her answer with a gay quotation :

“I would not hear your enemy say so,
Nor will I do mine ear that wrong
To make it trustee of your own report
Against yourself.”

Miss Vaughan, we are all competitors for your smiles, each eager to engross them.’

Something in the tone more than in the words made her cheeks redden. But she held herself in check till he should lay himself more open to rebuke.

‘I have no ambition,’ she said, ‘to be the prize of bow or ogle, of pretty speech or of broidered waistcoat, in your beaux “tournament.”’

‘Nature made men eager,’ he went on in a warmer

tone than he had yet used, 'when she made you beautiful. Beauty provokes covetousness sooner than jewels.'

'You mock me to say so,' she cried gaily, but there was a lurking anger in her eye that should have warned him. 'Poor beauty has but second place with you. When you would praise us most you go to wealth for your similitudes. Our eyes are diamonds, and our lips are rubies, and our teeth are pearls, and our hair is gold. So you but value us by our likeness to the jewels you love better than us.'

'Nay, 'tis the jewels' humble function to deck the beauty they cannot rival, like handmaids to the queen. If I might venture to hope you would wear those pearls on a bosom whiter than themselves, I would deem them happier than I can ever hope to be.'

He offered her as he spoke an open casket, in which was a superb necklet of pearls.

Still she mastered her growing anger, and the courtly Beauclerk secretly exulted.

'Is there no condition to so rich a gift?' she said, with affected carelessness, as she half lifted the glittering string from the casket he held.

'The subject makes no conditions with his queen,' he answered. 'I trust your royal bounty.'

He thought his suit was progressing. His voice took a bolder tone; he would have slipped an arm about her waist, but she dropped the pearls into the case, took one quick step backwards, and faced him with a look that held him still. Her colour was a

little heightened, her breath came quickly, and her bosom rose and fell. But she answered lightly as before, though his quick ear found the vibrating note of anger beneath the merry mockery of her words.

‘If I be queen, and you be subject, you should remember the queen can do no wrong. There is treason in your gifts, for which we banish you from our royal presence till you have learned that to the true woman, be she queen or only a poor actress, honour is more precious than either beauty or wealth.’

He took his defeat gallantly.

‘To hear is to obey,’ he said, with a profound bow, ‘though obedience be death,’ and so left her.

‘She beat me fairly, Langton; worse still, she shamed me. Carry it as I might, I left her presence like a whipped dog. She will be troubled no more by suit of mine. The pearls I will keep for a gift on her wedding day.’

Poor Roderick’s turn was yet to come. Of all her admirers he had pleased her most. His handsome face and comely figure captured her woman’s eyes. She had heard he was crossed in love, and pitied him. It may be that her woman’s heart divined the honesty of his love, and valued it the more that it had been won from a rival. So when she met him that same night at the theatre door as she stepped through, and when, raising his hat, he begged he might be allowed to see her to her home, she graciously bowed consent.

A moment later she regretted her complaisance, for the poor lad, overjoyed by his good fortune, lost his head. His shyness, as so often happens,

made him overbold. Of late he had lived a life of idle gallantry, and his tongue had caught the idle trick of speech in vogue amongst the wits. He buzzed his empty fantastic flatteries in her ear as they walked, and called her Phyllis and Chloe, and cited tags of amorous verse. He was so shy that he dared not be silent for a moment, so blind he did not see this cant of gallantry jarred her nerves and made her angry. She could not answer with easy scorn as she had answered Beauclerk; it may be because here her heart was touched. So she held her peace and quickened her pace till her walk had reached its end at last.

Then the foolish youth rushed on his fate. He had been waiting for the chance. When she turned to say good-night at her own door, he slipped a little parcel into the hand she offered, and with a sweeping bow would have departed. But Nellie called to him to stay.

‘One moment, if you please, Mr. O’Connor. I will read your letter now, and give my answer.’

There was a street-lamp close by, and she moved under its light. The poor poet shifted from one foot to another in an agony of shyness, while in a voice full of bitter mockery she read his foolishness :

“Should Phyllis frown if Damon woo?
Her shepherd’s love is warm and true.
Oh, let my ring thy finger hold
Encircled in its hoop of gold ;
For so thy love’s supreme control
In golden bondage holds my soul ;
Then take the token that I bring
Of love as endless as my ring.”’

There was a ring wrapped in the paper. Its diamonds glittered with sparks of coloured light as it lay for a moment in the palm of her white hand.

‘So this was meant for me?’ she said slowly. ‘I am the Phyllis and you the Damon of those amorous verses.’

The scorn in her voice made him wince as if he had been lashed across the face. He could find no words to answer; indeed, she gave him no time to find them.

‘This ring was to purchase my love. It is, doubtless, a ring of great price. I should be flattered, I suppose, that you value the commodity you would buy so highly.’

‘Indeed, indeed,’ he began earnestly, but she bore him down in the torrent of her words.

No more in scornful mockery, but now in downright honest anger, ‘I am a poor defenceless woman,’ she cried. ‘It is unmanly of you to offer me this insult. Ay, your proffered gift is an insult, and you know it. I am the fashion, it would seem, and am fair game to be chased by wits and dandies at whatever cost to my honour and maidenhood. Have you a sister?’ Again she gave him no time to answer, but like a flash there came to him the remembrance of an only sister that had died three years before. ‘If a man had treated your sister as you have treated me, a man whom she had scarcely spoken to had offered her his love-verses and his jewels in the public street, you would have spitted him on your sword. But I, you will say, am only an actress’—there

was a catch in her voice ; she was far more angry with him than she had been with Beauclerk—‘ a woman who plies for hire on the stage, whom fools and fops can come to gaze at when they please, whom all men are licensed to play with as they list.’

Even in his own agony of remorseful self-abasement he was conscious how lovely her anger looked ---cheeks flushed and eyes bright with unshed tears.

She paused for a moment. It may be she hoped he would speak a word in his own defence. But he was tongue-tied by very shame.

‘ And I had thought you a gentleman,’ she ended relentlessly, and hurried away, leaving him standing like a statue.

The door had closed on her before he moved. Then the glitter of the ring caught his eye where she had thrown it at his feet. He kicked it savagely into the channel and strode away, raging at his own folly and her scorn.

As Nellie paused on the stairs to still her beating heart and preen her ruffled plumage, she heard Goldsmith’s voice reading for her mother. With the quick thrill of gratitude for his faithful and honouring friendship, a feeling of rest and security came upon her that was very comforting.

She was in outward seeming her own gay self when she joined them.

‘ You are tired, Nellie,’ said the mother as she kissed her. The mother’s ears were keener than the man’s eyes.

‘ Sure fatigue never looked so radiant!’ cried

Goldsmith. 'Nellie, you are the herald of your own triumphs. They exult in your eyes.'

She shook her finger at him reprovingly.

'Don't you turn flatterer, sir,' she cried. 'Mother is right; I am tired of it all. I have played tragedy and comedy to-night'—her lips tightened as she remembered the last scene—'and I know not which is the more wearisome.'

'Surely it is a delight to give delight?'

'I doubt it. There are times when I am hurt by the empty mockery of it all. What is it to me that a crowd applaud or hiss? It is not me, but the thing I seem to be. Dr. Johnson was in the front row with Mr. Boswell beside him, like a monkey dismounted from the shoulders of his bear. I saw them just for a moment when I came on the stage, then the whole audience vanished, and I was Juliet in Venice. Oh! it frightens me sometimes——'

'What, Nellie?' the mother asked.

'The vivid reality of it while it lasts. I was in love with Romeo then, madly in love. I'm not in love with Mr. Garrick, though I like him well enough. But while Mr. Garrick was Romeo I loved him with a kind of delirium. His voice thrilled me to the heart. I could have died for him. Every passionate word I spoke I felt to my heart's core. Love wholly overmastered me. It is like waking from a vivid dream when the curtain falls. Sometimes I can hardly realize I am awake. When Romeo came to me to-night behind the curtain at the close and said, "You played wonderfully well, Miss Vaughan," the unreality of it made me dizzy. I

thought that was the dream, the stage was the waking. I think it hurts my real self, this constant make-belief.'

'Surely not,' said Goldsmith earnestly. 'You take men and women out of their own sordid life. You carry them into the regions of poetry and passion. You fill them with ennobling sympathy for others' sorrows.'

'I was not thinking of them, but of myself,' she answered slowly. 'It cannot be good for me to simulate love so fervently that it grows to a reality for the time. This is why actresses off the stage are lightly thought of. All their passions grow theatrical, and they are repaid in kind.' Her thoughts were not wholly of the stage.

Poor Goldsmith felt so strongly that his words tumbled over each other in the eagerness of his protest.

'You wrong yourself, Nellie, and you wrong your art. You, the greatest actress I have ever known, are the truest-hearted woman I have ever known, the most natural and sincere in thought and word.'

The mother nodded approval, and Nellie blushed, delighted at the praise.

'If you say so I must try to believe it,' she answered. 'It counts to my credit, too, that I love your poems, where all the simple virtues live, where all the simple joys of life abound. But I am very weary of excitement and make-belief.'

It was Goldsmith's turn to blush.

'My poems are part of myself,' he said. 'If you love the poems you must love the poet.'

‘And so I do!’ cried Nellie impetuously.

Not till the words were spoken, till his eyes looked in hers, did she realize how much her words meant. But she was not sorry or ashamed. Of late she had guessed, with women’s quick intuition, that he loved her, though he made no sign. She knew it now, and the knowledge filled her with a gentle pride, a pleasant, warming triumph, that she half mistook for love. By the light of his poetry she knew the man, his truth, his gentleness, his beneficent genius that gave delight and hurt not. She could not see his homeliness, his thriftlessness, his quaint oddities, for the atmosphere of poesy that encircled him. She glowed with delight that he should choose her for his love, and was too happy in that knowledge to question curiously her own heart if her love had been given in return. The tears stood in her eyes, and she turned away to hide them.

‘Juliet makes me grow lackadaisical,’ she said, after a pause, ‘yet in my heart I love joy, not sorrow, best. I am tired of tragedy.’

‘I will write a comedy,’ said Goldsmith, ‘if you will play in it.’

‘It is a bargain,’ she cried. ‘Make me bright and sprightly, please, full of fun and laughter.’

‘I would have you ever so. I would it were in my power to keep you ever so.’

There was a note of wistful entreaty in his voice. But now she was on her guard, and answered him with a touch of that innocent coquetry that no true woman is without.

‘To be ever playing comedy! Would you grant me no higher office in life than that?’

‘I know none good enough for you,’ he said simply.

‘Then I must need take the best that offers. There is a good part for us all in the world’s great drama if we could find it out. But you have drawn me off from the talk of the comedy you are to write and I to play in. You would slip out of your promise.’

‘The comedy is already half written.’

She clapped her hands delightedly.

‘You will let me read it, or, better still, you will read it for me.’

‘I dared hardly hope for so great a privilege. The day after to-morrow nothing goes forward at the theatre, so Garrick tells me. May I take you for a row on the Thames? Afterwards we can dine together at Greenwich, if Mrs. Vaughan will trust you so far to my protection.’

‘I would trust her anywhere with you, doctor,’ said the mother in a tone of which her blushing daughter did not miss the hidden meaning, though poor Goldsmith did.

‘Then it is settled,’ cried Nellie. ‘We will have our comedy on the river. Mind, I want a very happy ending to our play.’

‘Pray God it may prove so,’ Goldsmith muttered under his breath.

‘You will be lonely, mother.’ She patted the thin, wrinkled hand tenderly as she whispered it.

‘It is selfish to leave you so long alone.’

‘Your happiness is mine, my darling,’ the mother answered softly. ‘I live for no other end, and Dr. Goldsmith is the best man I have ever known.’

It seemed a serious speech for a slight occasion. But Nellie guessed why her mother spoke so earnestly of the day’s frolic on the river, and what might flow from it.

Meanwhile Goldsmith had drawn a paper from his bosom, which he had carried about with him for some days, longing, yet fearing, to deliver it.

As Nellie turned caressingly to her mother, he hastily slipped the paper between the leaves of the book she had been reading.

Then, frightened at his own temerity, he took the first chance he could to say good-night.

Girls can see round the corner. Not a movement of the poet had escaped Nellie’s keen eyes. When she led her mother to their common bedroom, she carried the letter clasped tight between the pages. As she helped her mother to bed, her thoughts were all the time upon the paper. Then, in turn, she slid swiftly out of her clothes and slipped in white robe between the white sheets. She said good-night sleepily, and made belief to quench the lamp as usual, but instead she set it silently on a small round table beside her bed, took the letter from between the leaves of the book, opened it without the faintest rustle of the paper, and read :

‘Oh, love has its home in the heavens ; to earth like the lightning it flies !

We met and we parted as strangers ; a moment I looked in your eyes.

I looked in your eyes but a moment, yet love in that moment
 had birth,
To be the chief part of my being while I have a place upon
 earth ;
For a heart that was callous or careless, or lightly by fancies
 was stirred,
As lightly the oak leaves are shaken by the wing of the
 breeze or the bird,
Was flooded by passionate longing, and I marvelled how this
 might be,
That one glance from your eyes could enkindle the love of a
 lifetime for me.
I had gazed on the glories of fashion, had pitied the simpering
 throng
She has bound to the wheels of her chariot, and hales in her
 triumph along.
In the midst of the crowd I was lonely, regarding with easy
 disdain
Society's small tittle-tattle, despicable pleasure or pain ;
I had looked upon beautiful faces—on faces as fair as your
 own :
They were fair painted pictures of folly ; they had beauty, but
 beauty alone.
So I lived in the dreams of the poets, entranced by the
 pictures they drew
Of womanhood gentle and tender, of womanhood noble and
 true,
Till my heart had grown weary of longing that for once in
 this world I might meet
A woman so worthy the homage I was ready to lay at her
 feet—
A helpmate to lighten the struggles and sweeten the pleasures
 of life,
The best gift in God's infinite bounty, the love of a true-
 hearted wife.
The fair scenes of the earth and the famous I would visit with
 her by my side,
And Nature's bright face would grow brighter to welcome my
 beautiful bride ;

Our home a remembrance of Eden e'er evil or sorrow had
birth,

When the father and mother of lovers were alone on this
beautiful earth,

And God on their love smiled indulgent, enraptured the day
and the night ;

Gay paradise blossomed around them, and life was too short
for delight,

So my heart and my brain might be strengthened the
primeval command to obey.

In truth and humanity's service to do honest work in my day ;
With courage that love can inspire, with you to incite and
sustain,

The earth has few prizes so splendid I dare not attempt and
attain.

In the resolute effort to raise you all sordid privation above,
Man's lot is to love and to labour, but woman's sole duty to
love.

I grew pale as the fair vision glided like love's own embodi-
ment passed,

For my heart whispered, truly or falsely, "Your prayer has
been granted at last."

CHAPTER X

A PEEP INTO PARADISE

‘ Oh, how this spring of love resembleth
The uncertain glory of an April day
Which now shows all the beauty of the sun
And by-and-by a cloud takes all away !’

NELLIE lay for a long time very still and silent after she had read the poet's love lines, listening to the quick beating of her own heart. She was full of an innocent pride and wonder that he had chosen her out of all the women of the world, but she was frightened too. She longed to be to him all that he had hoped. There was a curious blending of pity and reverence in her thoughts of him—pity for the careless, shiftless, child-like man, and reverence for the poet. It would be a labour of love, she felt, to make his life happier. They were pleasant thoughts that filled her mind. They were pleasant pictures her imagination painted of the future. She fancied she loved him because as yet she knew nothing of love, but in her placid, cheerful thought of him there was no glimmer of the keen and pure rapture that fills the young maid's heart when she first awakens to the knowledge she loves and is beloved, and the whole earth brightens with her joy.

‘Mother,’ she said at last very softly, and nestled closer to her mother’s side, ‘are you asleep?’

‘No, my darling. I knew you were reading a letter from Dr. Goldsmith, and I thought you might wish to speak to me afterwards.’

Nellie kissed her before she spoke again.

‘If he asks me to be his wife, what shall I say to him?’

‘Whatever your own heart prompts you, Nell.’

But her heart refused to prompt, so she pressed her mother for an answer.

‘If you love him, Nell, be sure my blessing goes with your love.’

But love having no share in the business, friendship, pity, and admiration carried it amongst them, and then she slept as peacefully as a happy child.

She was awake betimes in the morning, and wrote her answer, and slipped quietly out to post it ere day broke. She had sent the note on its way, and was coming slowly home a little frightened at what she had done. As she reached the door, something glittering in the first rays of the morning sun caught her eyes. Half unconsciously she stooped for it. Then, with a little quick cry of surprise, she picked up from the dust of the kennel the diamond ring she had flung so scornfully from her the night before.

‘He let it lie there,’ she thought, with a pang of admiration at his recklessness; ‘he did not think it worth his while to pick it out of the dust. How my words must have hurt him! I fear I was too hard.’

She blew the dust from the diamonds, and rubbed them with her handkerchief till they shone with living fire in the sunlight. Then she slipped the ring instinctively on her finger, where it fitted so close that it hurt her to pull it off again.

Thus coming to her hands the ring was a trouble to her. She did not know what to do with it. She could not let it lie in the street, and she could not get it back to the owner, for she had no notion where or how he lived. She fingered it nervously all day. It seemed of great value, and the sparkle of the bright stones was a reproach. She had been very hard on him she told herself again and again. He might have meant no harm. That her words hurt was certain; the diamonds lying neglected in the dust were proof of it.

She hoped to meet him that night in the theatre, where he was a constant attendant, and carried the ring there with her, resolved that a word of apology should go back with it.

But he was not there, and as she waited for a moment at the stage door in the last hope of seeing him she was accosted by a big coarse man, whom she knew by name as Anthony Jenkins, and whom she regarded with special repulsion.

But she was bold within the circle of the theatre lamps, and with a look of scorn that made even the thick-skinned Anthony wince, she called a sedan-chair, and so got quickly and safely home, more perplexed than ever what to do or say about the ring or its owner.

Next morning, however, they were both forgotten

as the hour drew near when Goldsmith was to call by appointment to carry her to Greenwich.

All other feelings were absorbed and vanished in excited expectation of her first meeting with the man who was to be her husband.

Only two days ago she met Dr. Goldsmith as easily, as familiarly, as she met her mother. She loved to see his genial, homely face; she loved to hear his pleasant voice. His talk, gay or serious, warm with kindly feeling, vivid with bright imagination, had a special charm for her. But heretofore it had been a gentle and unexciting pleasure. Now all that was changed. It was still with pleasure she waited his coming, a keener pleasure than before, but shyness and something like fear mingled with pleasant anticipation. Not for one moment could she sit still while she waited. Now she smoothed her hair, now pulled a ribbon straight or set a flower in its place, and wondered all the time at the serious, half-frightened face that looked at her out of the mirror.

And all the time her thoughts ran wild. Eagerly she questioned her heart.

‘I am glad he is coming,’ she answered her own questioning—‘glad he is coming to claim me. If I am nervous and frightened,’ she protested, ‘it is because I love him; yes, that is surely the reason—because I love him.’

She was surprised to find how calm, how entirely at her ease she found herself when he came at last.

He was more quietly dressed than usual, for, as a rule, he loved gay colours. But to-day his coat

was of dark olive-green silk, brightened only by the touch of white lace at the throat and sleeves. The kindly face looked handsome to Nellie, despite its homeliness.

In his honest eyes was wistful admiration, yet he seemed a little sad, she thought, and wondered to find him so.

How winsome she was ! poor Goldsmith told himself ; how much too good for him !

It did not need a lover's eyes to see her so. She was an embodiment of the gay sunshine and the spring. Woman to her finger-tips, she knew how nice she looked. The gown, of a pale blue silk that was almost gray, was her colour to a shade. The broad straw hat, tilted up at the side, with blue cornflower slightly tossed on to it, challenged admiration for the lovely face. Her cheeks were flushed with excitement, and her eyes very bright and blue.

They met with their every-day greeting, and as they walked down the street in the sunshine their tongues kept clear of the subject on which their thoughts centred. Lightly they chatted of everyday topics. He told her the latest gossip of the Literary Club, and she told him in return of the green-room. Their talk was not the less gay or brilliant because they gave only their minds, *not* their hearts, to it.

But when they had taken oars to Greenwich, and were seated together in the stern of the wherry, which glided with smooth bounds over the calm surface of the river to the long, strong pull of the rowers, Goldsmith touched at last on the subject near their hearts.

‘Nellie,’ he said gravely, ‘I got your note. Though it filled me with such rapture as my life had never known before, yet I have to-day to give you back your pledge.’

For one moment she turned to him with hurt surprise. Then she saw the love-light shining in his eyes, and all her woman’s heart exulted. It was her privilege to refuse the sacrifice he would make, to give him happiness whether he would or no. At the thought all her gay sportiveness came back to her sparkling eyes and dimpled cheeks.

She pouted roguishly, while dancing eyes belied her lips.

‘So you have already repented of your bargain. You don’t love me, you won’t have me, and I must wear the willow for your sake.’

‘Nellie, Nellie, you must not mock me. You know I love you better than my life. I love you so well I dare not take you. I am old and plain, and poor and dull.’

‘Oh, very dull,’ she assented mockingly—‘very dull and stupid; all the world knows that.’

‘I dare not claim such youth and beauty for my own. It was mere selfishness that tempted me to write to you. Forget my words, my dear, and forget your answer. Let us be friends, as we have been, till a love more fitting comes to carry you away from me.’

‘No, no,’ she said gaily, but wilfully withal, and shook a white finger at him; ‘I will keep my word, sir, and you shall keep yours.’

‘It is your pity that says so, Nell. You cannot love me.’

‘I do! I do!’ she cried vehemently to herself not less than to him. ‘What, then, is love if this be not? I have loved your thoughts before I knew you, and now I love you for their sake, and them the more for yours. I joy at our meetings and grieve at our partings. There is no man living I could be so happy with, none I would compare with you. Is not this love?’

‘But you do not know me, Nell, as I am,’ he pleaded against himself.

‘Nay, I know you better than you know yourself.’

‘You know only the best part of me. My purest and my holiest thoughts are in my books, and in my love for you. For the rest, Nellie, I am a very weak and commonplace person.’

‘I don’t believe it,’ she cried gaily.

‘But, my dearest Nell, you must believe me. I should be a rascal to win your affections on false pretences. I am a hopeless, helpless good-for-nothing, who have broken down in a hundred avocations before I arrived in Grub Street. I have begged my way across the Continent and back again. I can earn little money, and save none. Even now I am hopelessly in debt. I’m——’

‘You are a poet, sir, the greatest of your age. You are the author of “The Deserted Village” and “The Traveller,” that will live to fill the world with innocent delight. You are the kindest, honestest, dearest of friends, and you are

to be my husband. So there! Now let me tell you, Dr. Goldsmith, I won't have my future husband slandered by any man, even by himself.'

Dipping her hand in the water, she sprinkled him with the sparkling drops.

'Oh, Nell,' he cried reproachfully, 'this is no jesting matter to me.'

'Do you think I jest, dearest?' she answered with sudden gravity. 'Believe me, I cried last night when I read your poem, but they were very happy tears. I gloried in the thought of being your wife, and I glory in it still.'

'I ought never to have sent the lines,' said poor Goldsmith penitently. 'They were written in a dream. But now I am awake, and know my folly, I am not worthy of you.'

'You said that before,' Nellie retorted saucily; 'you need not repeat yourself. 'Tis an odd wooing where the maid is forward and the man is coy. This talk is tiresome to both of us; let us have no more of it. You cannot throw me off; I will stick like a burr, so you must need make the best of me.'

In spite of himself, his great joy at her resolute answer showed in his eyes.

'Be it so,' he said, 'if you will have it so. But, remember, you were warned.'

'And laughed at the warning.'

'Remember too, Nellie, your liberty is always yours for the asking.'

'I will never ask it. Such bondage is dearer than

freedom to me. I will share your life, I will glory in your fame. Your happiness will be my only care, for I love you—indeed I love you.’

But even as she said the words an uneasy feeling in her heart questioned the truth of them.

Then she won him to talk of other things—his life, his work, his hopes and thoughts. The gay beauty of the scenes through which they smoothly glided made their hearts gay. The river swarmed with merry-makers, and the noise of laughter and snatches of gay songs filled the summer air. Back from the bright river’s bank the green lawns sloped, with glimpses of villas and gardens seen through the curtained vistas of the overhanging trees. All the world was lovely with the spring.

They dined at Greenwich at a small table looking out over the river, and rowed back together in the moonlight. But through the long day on water or land no word of the comedy was spoken. They were wholly absorbed in their own life.

‘Not tired of me yet?’ she asked in playful mockery as she took his hand to step ashore at the London wharf.

‘The saved souls shall tire of heaven first,’ he answered fervently. ‘You have given me the memory of one whole day of perfect happiness. Nothing that happens can ever rob me of that.’

‘Nell,’ he whispered as they parted, ‘let us keep our own counsels for the present. If you should change your mind——’

‘I never will.’

‘Believe me, I will not murmur if you do. But you will please me in this?’

‘You are my lord and master,’ she answered; ‘I have no wish but yours. Let it be as you will,’ and she kissed him frankly as they parted.

Then she ran lightly up the stairs past the door of the room where her mother sat, so that she might end an exciting day with a good cry, as comforting to women as the dew to summer fields after long sunshine.

When she raised her face from her wet pillow, through the sparkle of tears in her eyes there shone a brighter sparkle from the ring which she had thrown carelessly on a corner of the dressing-table.

A queer little pang of remorse shot through her at the sight of it, a chill sensation of something precious lost for ever. Almost angrily she flung it into a corner of a dark drawer, and snapped the key sharply. Then she dried her eyes, and went slowly downstairs to answer the pleased and loving questions of her mother.

It was surely a strange chance that when Goldsmith came again the next day he did not come alone.

Nellie was sitting in a corner behind an embroidery frame, on which a brilliant parrot, with green and gold and purple plumage, was growing to slow maturity, and Goldsmith did not see her at first as he entered, nor she him.

‘Mrs. Vaughan,’ he said, ‘I have taken a liberty

to-night which I trust you will pardon. Let me present to you my dear friend and godson.'

At the sound of his voice Nellie started and looked round the corner of her frame, and saw her mother holding Roderick O'Connor by the hand, while Goldsmith stood smilingly beside him.

CHAPTER XI

BUSYBODY BOSWELL

‘Marry, this is miching mallecho ; it means mischief.’

RODERICK O’CONNOR, plainly dressed in black, looked, Nellie thought, very penitent and humble and handsome. His eyes drooped when he met hers, his cheek flushed, and he faltered in his courteous commonplaces to her mother.

As always happens, his cowardice made her brave. She bowed and smiled when Goldsmith presented him to her in turn, and frankly offered her hand. When he diffidently touched it with his lips, the touch thrilled her as poor Goldsmith’s kiss had never done.

‘I only come to ask your forgiveness,’ he said in a low tone. ‘I cannot rest till you forgive me.’

‘Then you must change forgiveness with me,’ she answered in a voice as low. ‘I was wrong, and I’m sorry.’

‘You have made me very happy,’ he said simply. ‘Be sure I shall not again offend.’

The answer did not wholly please her, yet she smiled a winning smile and looked so pleased that honest Goldsmith interposed :

‘I knew you two would be friends. I told him so, Nell—I told him so. And yet I could hardly coax him to come.’

They two were good friends. Their friendship grew from day to day, for he came often after that, generally with Goldsmith, but sometimes alone, and was always welcome to mother and daughter. They both loved him the better that in Goldsmith’s absence he was ever warm in the praise of his friend.

Poor Goldsmith, fearing nothing, suspecting nothing, rejoiced in the growing intimacy. He noticed with satisfaction that Roderick drew himself clear of the wild company with which he had lived. The gambling hells and casinos knew him no more, though he still occasionally frequented the fencing-school and was constant at the theatre.

Nellie had twice tried to restore the ring to its owner, but he begged her so earnestly to keep it for him that, conscious of past injustice, she had not the heart to refuse.

‘I will come to you for it when I want it,’ he promised her.

As their friendship grew he was often accorded the privilege of seeing her home from the theatre in Goldsmith’s absence, but he never again tempted his fate with flippant love-making. Brother and sister might have talked as they talked in those pleasant little walks which both found short. Their words were formal and commonplace. Their thoughts—well, their thoughts were their own, and they kept them to themselves. Indeed, poor Nellie would have found it hard to put her thoughts in

words. She was conscious only that they were very pleasant, and left her half delighted, half remorseful.

Meanwhile an onlooker of whom neither dreamt crossed the pleasant current of their lives. Anthony Jenkins watched them with a growing anxiety, to which avarice and jealousy lent double poison. Nellie had wakened in his breast that rude passion which, with such men, goes by the name of love.

Their comings and goings, their frank comradeship, boded ill to his hopes of fortune. On this point, at least, he was sordidly practical. Scarce five months of the six prescribed by the secret will had yet elapsed. If they two married within the time, Anthony Jenkins would lose girl and money together, and though he prized the fortune much, he prized the girl more.

He had set his cunning brain to work to find a way out of the double difficulty, and believed he had found it.

Roderick, as has been said, of late had 'forsook sack and lived cleanly.' But he was not to be so cheaply rid of the fruits of his follies. He had sown debts broadcast, and they speedily ripened into duns. A debtor cannot stand still; he must spend or pay. If he grow thrifty his creditors grow clamorous. Poor Roderick found it so. His small patrimony was strictly entailed, and he had to meet his creditors' demands as best he could out of his income. They, knowing his condition, did not press their claims, but he kept his freedom only by their tolerance.

Here Anthony Jenkins saw his chance, and took it. He bought up poor Roderick's bonds and judgment debts from the Jews, and made his arrangements to land him quietly in the Fleet.

But the business got abroad, in spite of his precautions, before the quarry was captured. One money-lender, who was squeezed too hard, had, in spite of his promise of secrecy, blabbed to a spendthrift customer how Anthony Jenkins was making ready to lay Roderick O'Connor by the heels, vaunting his own moderation by the contrast. So the story passed from mouth to mouth, and was buzzed about in the coffee-houses and in the green-rooms, and came at last to the ears of Nellie Vaughan herself from the lips of an incomparable gossip.

Boswell was one of her many satellites. The fact that she was talked about and admired sufficed for him. Above all, the great Dr. Johnson approved. Boswell applauded because the public applauded. He would as readily have hissed if the public hissed. A word from Dr. Johnson would have turned his admiration of her acting into contempt. He could not help himself in this ; it was his nature. He loved to strut in the train of popularity, hoping to shine with reflected light, which served but to show how small and dull he was. He restlessly clamoured for his pittance of the applause, which turned to ridicule when it reached him.

As Nellie lingered one night at the stage-door, hoping, though she would have denied the hope even to herself, for Roderick's coming, she was accosted by James Boswell instead.

At the sound of his voice at her elbow she turned sharply round with a start that had no pleasure in it.

‘Forgive me,’ he said, with officious courtesy. ‘I thought perhaps you expected my very good friend Mr. Roderick O’Connor. But as I fear he cannot be much abroad at present, I beg to offer my services in his room.’

Anger was her first feeling that he had divined her thoughts. But there was a sly, half-malicious significance in his allusion to Roderick that wakened her anxiety and curiosity and conquered her anger.

‘I will be very glad of your escort, Mr. Boswell,’ she said sweetly.

So quick her thoughts flashed through her mind that the answer came pat upon his request.

She was puzzling how she could get him to tell what she wanted to know of Roderick O’Connor, when he saved her the trouble by going straight to the subject of his own accord. He was brimful of the gossip, and could not choose but overflow.

‘You have heard the news of Mr. O’Connor, Miss Vaughan?’ he began.

‘No,’ she answered coldly. ‘I have but slight acquaintance with the gentleman.’

‘Indeed! Why, I thought that——’

Whatever it was he thought, he did not tell it. A glance at her face and he broke off abruptly, and drifted back to his gossip.

‘The poor gentleman, as I can hear, has been unfortunate.’

‘Not hurt?’

A quicker-witted man than James Boswell would have noted the tremor in her voice. But he was too absorbed in himself and in his story.

‘Not bodily hurt, Miss Vaughan, but his liberty is in danger.’

‘In danger! How?’

He was not to be hurried with his story.

‘You know Mr. Anthony Jenkins, Miss Vaughan?’

‘Yes. What has he to do with Mr. O’Connor’s liberty?’

‘Everything,’ Boswell replied complacently. ‘It seems Mr. Jenkins has taken some grudge against O’Connor; he has bought up his bonds, and, as the story runs, he means to lay him by the heels in the Fleet. Mr. O’Connor has been sadly extravagant, I hear, and, as my great and good friend Johnson has said, “Extravagance consumeth——”’

But she cut short his second-hand moralizing without scruple.

‘You are sure of this?’

‘I had it from a most infallible source.’

There was a brief silence. Her busy brain was anxiously at work. But there was nothing more than commonplace civility in her voice as she said:

‘Mr. Boswell, as you have come so far on my account, perhaps you will step in and drink a dish of tea with my mother and myself?’

He was ludicrously elated. It was a privilege he had often longed for. Bitterly had he envied Goldsmith, who came and went at will. Now it

was his turn. Even as he murmured his thanks, a little incoherently in his excitement, he planned how he would let it fall carelessly in the club and coffee-house that he was accustomed to drink tea alone in her own lodgings when the play was over with the famous actress, Miss Vaughan. He actually planned the words in which the announcement was to be made.

Safe in the drawing-room, he talked second-hand Johnsonese to Mrs. Vaughan, who was, if the truth be told, a little bored by his pompous inanity. But Nellie was monstrous polite to him all the time.

Just as he was leaving she handed him a note she had scribbled hastily.

'It is for your friend, Dr. Goldsmith,' she said. 'I know you are very intimate with him, and as I am anxious that the note may get safe to his own hands as soon as possible, I venture to trouble you.'

'Forgive the correction, Miss Vaughan,' said Boswell: "'pleasure" is the word you should have used, not "trouble." The great poet truly says, "The labour we delight in physics pain." The line is Shakespeare's, as I am sure you are well aware. I venture on this occasion to make the sentiment my own.'

He was so pleased with his reply that when he got out of the house he paused under a street-lamp to put it down in his note-book under the heading of 'Apt Quotation.'

At the same moment he glanced at the letter which Nellie had given him. The superscription was simply, 'Dr. Goldsmith, by favour of James

Boswell, Esq. To be delivered immediately in his own hands.'

She had sealed the letter so hastily that the blazing wax had burst the silk thread that tied it, and the paper lay open in his hands.

There are many degrees in meanness. Temptation and resistance depend on temperament. With almost any other man than Boswell this trivial accident would have made no difference at all. The honourable man would have carried the letter unsealed and unread to its destination. On the other hand, the frankly dishonourable man would have made no scruple to tamper with seal or thread to read it. But with Boswell just this little accident was needed to give his curiosity the victory over his honour. He would not have tampered with the seal, he would not have cut the thread. But he could not resist the temptation to read when he found the letter lying open and unprotected in his hand. He hid the meanness of the action from himself by the thought, 'If the matter were secret she would have sealed more carefully.'

The note was very brief.

'DEAREST (it ran),

'There is a matter of much moment of which I must speak to you instantly. I do not wish my mother to hear of it. When the play is done to-morrow I will come privily to your chambers. Be not from home as you love me.

'Ever your own,

'NELLIE.'

Boswell had the mind of a meddling maiden aunt, the petty prudery of a spiteful spinster, and his prudery was spiced with a malicious envy that the famous actress, who was barely civil to him, should lavish her favours on 'poor half-witted Noll Goldsmith.'

He worked himself into a flutter of indignation that he, James Boswell, a gentleman of Scotland, of good family and estate, should be made the means to bring about this scandalous clandestine meeting! What was he to do about it? His first thought, of course, was to consult 'the Sage.' But he was not altogether a fool. He had a cunning inkling of what the stern old moralist would say to the reading of the private letter. 'Sir,' he thought he heard him thunder, 'it was a shabby action. Sir, you cannot justify wrong-doing by the pretence of superior virtue.' He had heard such rebukes thundered at him often before when instances of his spying and tattling had come to Johnson's ears, and he did not want the ordeal repeated. What should he do? He asked himself the question persistently the whole way to his lodgings, and it was only as he fitted the key to the door the answer came.

He would consult Mistress Caroline.

She was a virtuous lady, and would appreciate his motives and guide him by her advice. She always favoured him; she greatly admired his person and his conversation—she had as good as told him so. When he read his verses to her she pronounced them excellent. She was not clever, it was true—nay,

she was simple as a child—but she could recognise cleverness in others. There were times when he was almost tempted to reward her simple-minded admiration of himself by making her Mrs. Boswell. He was glad to have the chance to see her again, glad to discuss a love secret with her. There was a little song he had just thrown off—a witty, sprightly trifle, and which he knew would please her.

He hugged himself on the happy thought that he would see Caroline next day and talk this delicious bit of scandal over with her. On the strength of it he uncorked a bottle of port, and drinking Caroline's health at every glass, so drank himself tipsy to bed.

CHAPTER XII

THE TRAP

‘Doubtless the pleasure is as great
Of being cheated as to cheat.’

‘IN good truth ’tis a most unmaidenly writing,’ said Caroline to Boswell, ‘and I marvel that maid should write it.’

Boswell—sly dog!—had come so close to help her in the reading that his arm was half round her waist, but in her simple innocence she did not notice.

‘You are too childish and simple for this wicked world, Miss Caroline,’ he said; ‘you know not its naughty ways.’

‘Nor care to know them, Mr. Boswell; and yet in faith I lie. You, I fear, are one of those gay and naughty cavaliers of whom discreet virgins should be wary, but I cannot find it in my heart to forbid myself to you.’

He chuckled unctuously, and she watched him demurely from the corner of an averted eye.

‘Alas! I am a plain country gentleman,’ he said, ‘who knows naught of the wickedness of town.’

‘Oh, la! you mock me, Mr. Boswell. All the world knows you are first amongst the wits and

gallants, the most courted man about town. Dr. Johnson cannot make verses as well as you, nor Mr. Beauclerk make love. Of the love-making, in sooth, I cannot say—with a sly look under her lashes—‘but sure, your verses are the finest in the world.’

‘Of my love-making you may know more anon, Miss Caroline,’ cried the delighted Boswell; ‘but my verses are the merest trifles thrown off in the heat of the moment. I have a song by me that I wrote the other day at a sitting, if you would care to hear me read it.’

‘I should love it of all things.’

‘’Tis written in the character of a Benedict, which, you must know, is the wit’s word for husband, and it runs thus :

‘In the blithe days of honeymoon,
With Kitty’s allurements smitten,
I loved her late, I loved her soon,
And called her dearest Kitten.

‘But now my kitten’s grown a cat,
And cross like other wives;
Oh, by my soul ! my honest Mat,
I fear she has nine lives.’

She turned herself away that he might not see the mockery in her eyes, but he was too self-absorbed to notice. The quick-witted woman knew every nook and crevice of his vain, shallow nature, and she fooled him to the top of his bent.

‘Oh, la ! Mr. Boswell, I am quite afraid of you. You are so clever and sarcastic. But is it thus you will treat a wife when you get one ?’

‘There you tax me too closely, Caroline. Wit must have its allowances.’

‘But who is “honest Mat”?’ she queried with demure simplicity. ‘Do I know the gentleman?’

‘Nay; he is but of my own imagining—a device of the poet, a necessity of the verse. I needed his name to rhyme with cat. I tried other words before I hit upon it. Pat was my first idea. But it would not do; I could not bring it in pat.’

He chuckled at his own joke, and fain would have drawn out his note-book to have entered it down. But he was content to repeat it twice that he might remember it.

‘But why cat, Mr. Boswell?’ she asked innocently. ‘I will swear that no woman could ever be unloving to a fine gentleman like you. By my troth, I like the first lines the best. How do they go?’

He came so close that he almost whispered the words in her ear. Her shy looks, and her soft words, and her ripe womanliness fired his blood.

‘Caroline,’ he began hastily, ‘it is for you to decide. If you should choose——’

She saw the proposal coming, and cut it short. She did not mean to have or to refuse him just at present.

‘But I cannot decide,’ she interposed, wilfully misunderstanding him. ‘If you do not deliver the letter she will make question of your honour. If you do deliver it you are, as it may be said, a go-between.’

Boswell chuckled inwardly that in her simplicity

she had missed his meaning. The canny Scotchman in him rejoiced over the lover that he had been saved from the matrimonial trap baited with penniless beauty. So he followed her lead smoothly.

‘In good truth, it is a perplexing piece of business, Mistress Caroline, and I should be glad of a modest maid’s counsel in it. I should rejoice if I might come again for your opinion. At the present I am—that is, I must——’ He wanted to say he was hungry and thirsty for his luncheon, having made no breakfast, but he could not get a fine phrase to fit the commonplace matter.

She saved him the trouble. She wanted to get rid of him, for she expected a visit from Anthony Jenkins.

‘I will be glad to think it over, and give you my counsel in an hour’s time,’ she said.

Left alone, she turned to her mirror, pulled the ribbons in her cap to a fuller bow, shook out the brocaded silk of her full skirt over her swelling hoops, twisted the little rebellious love-locks at her forehead to a crisper curl, and bit her full lips to a riper red.

Jenkins came in without knocking with the careless swagger of a man who knows himself welcome and is half satiated with endearments.

‘Why, Carry, you look brave to-day; this finery becomes you.’

It was carelessly said, but she blushed at the compliment.

‘’Tis worn to please you, Toney,’ she answered softly.

‘And it pleases me right well, wench,’ he said, still carelessly, as he touched her expectant lips with his. ‘If all else were as pleasant I should have scant cause to grumble.’

‘Goes anything amiss?’

‘Nay, everything; but chiefly ’tis that young fool O’Connor that troubles me. A plague on him and on my own bungling blade. I would I had a second chance at him, I should make all sure.’

‘Why should he trouble you, Toney? ’Tis scarce a month from his limit.’

‘A marriage is a matter of minutes, my girl, when the parties are agog for it. The lad is in love again, or I am no judge of the fool’s malady. I would you had held him when you had him, wench.’

‘The fault was more yours than mine, Toney. But he has consoled himself quicker than I thought, if you speak truth. Who is it?’

‘Miss Nellie Vaughan.’

‘The wax doll! blue-eyed, pink-cheeked—the actress woman. No, no!’

‘But I say ay, and a dozen ay’s to the back of it. Worse still, the actress woman, as you call her, is amorous too.’

‘You mean she loves Roderick?’

‘Just that and no more. You are slow of wit to-day, Carrie.’

‘’Tis you run counter. You follow on a false scent. Your actress woman loves Dr. Goldsmith.’

‘Loves the little squat, pock-marked poet! Impossible!’

‘But I have the proof that you lack.’ She put

poor Nellie's letter into his big paw. 'The actress gave that letter to Boswell to deliver into the Doctor's own hands, and Boswell brought it to me.'

'But it is absurd that such a woman should love such a man!'

'You are very hot about such a woman and her loves.'

'I, Carry? Nay; she is naught to me.'

'I trust so. This letter shows, at least, you are naught to her. Wrote ever woman so but to the man she loved?'

'I trust so, and yet I fear it.'

'Fear what?' the woman asked sharply. 'That she loves him, or that she loves him not?'

'I would keep her and Roderick O'Connor apart by any device.'

'Then I will tell the fool Boswell that he must deliver the letter. He returns in an hour's time for my counsel.'

'That must be thought further upon. I dare not trust a woman's fancy for an old man if a young man woo. Goldsmith and O'Connor are friends. It may be the young lovers make the foolish poet their cover for an intrigue.'

'The girl troubles you too much, Toney.'

'The money troubles me, Carry. A fig for the girl; she is not worthy to tie your shoe-string.' He caught her close to him as he spoke, and patted her smooth cheek with his rough hand. 'Yet she is dangerous, I tell you, Carry, to you and to me. We must devise some plot to be well rid of her. By George! I have it.'

‘ May one hear ?’

‘ Presently. This intermeddling fool Boswell will, you say, be guided by you ?’

‘ He is my lap-dog, to fetch and carry as I bid him.’

‘ This Nellie Vaughan has many lovers.’

‘ I care not so you be not one of them.’

‘ What ! jealous again, my girl. You wrong yourself and me, Carry. You know I love you.’

‘ You are very slow to prove it, then.’

‘ Is not the date of our wedding fixed when this cursed six months has passed ?’

‘ I know not what the six months has got to say to us. I was willing, as you know, to marry you at once and risk the fortune.’

‘ You hoped to draw O’Connor back to you, you told me, and hold him dangling.’

‘ And if I did, was that a reason why—well, well, it is no matter ; but look you, Toney : keep faith with me, or ’twill be worse for you. Now tell your plot, and I will help it if I may.’

‘ This girl must be removed from O’Connor’s pursuit.’

‘ Till the month go by ?’

‘ That I meant, that I would have said, if you but gave me time. Of course, till the month go by. Afterwards it concerns us not. You have heard of Lord Molock ?’

‘ The wicked lord ?’

‘ The wicked lord. That title, at least, he has honestly earned. He cares not for man, nor God, nor devil. He has set his heart on Nell Vaughan,

and means to have her by fair means or by foul, but foul, I should say, for a preference. Now, this is my device : You arrange it with your fool Boswell that the letter shall be undelivered, and that Dr. Goldsmith shall be from his lodgings when the girl comes there. Meanwhile I will see Lord Molock. He will be one of the chairmen to carry the amorous actress to her poet. He will find a friend to lend a hand. In Goldsmith's empty rooms he will take precautions that she shall not struggle nor cry out, and thence he may carry her at his ease to the country, where he has a pleasant cage for such singing-birds.'

'And what part take you in this adventure?'

Her eyes were sharp with jealousy, but he met them without wincing.

'I? None. What part should I have? When I have put my Lord Molock on the track my share of the work is done. For his own sake he will hold her sure. When that tattling fool Boswell begins to talk, as talk he will, suspicion must needs light on Dr. Goldsmith, to whose rooms she went alone. Come, Carry, be a good wench, as you always were; help me but in this, and strike me dead if I do not marry you within a fortnight.'

He kissed her as he spoke, and she nestled to him.

'Toney, Toney,' she murmured, 'you do with me what you will; but you will keep your promise?'

'If I live,' he said; 'may the devil take me else.'

'Well, now you must go,' she said regretfully; 'my lap-dog will be here presently.'

With another perfunctory kiss he swaggered from the room.

Boswell found her a little later sedately resolved.

‘I have pondered on what you ask me,’ she said, ‘and sought counsel in prayer. You must not deliver the naughty note.’

‘I had so determined,’ he answered; ‘it would be to connive at the offence.’

‘But there is more,’ she went on demurely, ‘to be considered in this intricate business. If she come expecting to find him, and finds him, the harm is done, and you will be put to your excuse.’

‘I had not thought of that.’

‘It must be thought of. Goldsmith must be from his room when she comes there.’

‘But how may that be managed? He is constantly at home of late.’

‘Can you not think of a way?’

‘Of none.’

‘Might not Dr. Johnson send for him? He would go to him if he sent.’

‘Of a surety he would go. But there is little likelihood that such a thing should just so chance to serve our purpose.’

‘Then let us make that little likelihood certain. You can write in Dr. Johnson’s hand upon a pinch. You have told me he has himself mistaken your writing for his own.’

‘I guess your meaning, but I dare not do it. It were too dangerous a trial. He is fierce as a bear when he is roused.’

‘There will be no danger. The note will come to Dr. Goldsmith by another hand bidding him meet Dr. Johnson at his lodgings. If he suspect, which, as you know, is most unlike, he will not care to speak of it, a lady’s reputation being at stake. In no case can it be traced to you.’

‘But ’tis a forgery,’ Boswell urged nervously; ‘’tis against the law.’

‘You have written many such forgeries,’ she said, ‘from mere wantonness each time you imitated the doctor’s writing, but never before to such good purpose. If it be a fraud, ’tis a most pious fraud. There is no breach of the law where there is none found. Besides, good laws were never meant to punish right-doing. You know not what scandal you may avert. She will come, and, not finding him, will deem herself slighted, will depart in a fume and come no more. It may be the cause of a happy breach between the two, for which she will live to thank you. ’Tis your duty, Mr. Boswell, as I see it, and you are not one to shirk a duty.’

The cunning jade knew the bait to catch his restless, intermeddling vanity.

‘I fear you are right, Miss Caroline,’ he sighed, ‘though it goes sorely against my grain. To do a great good we must do a little evil, as the bard says. I thank you much for your advice, and I will e’en follow it.’

With that he would have kissed her. But she slipped from his restraining arm so quickly, yet so coyly, and with such a quick sidelong glance of invitation, she but tempted him the more.

‘I may come again to tell you how our enterprise has thriven?’

‘To-morrow, if it please you.’

‘And claim my reward?’

‘Virtue is ever its own reward, Mr. Boswell, and you, I know, are virtuous.’

CHAPTER XIII

A RESCUE

‘Good people, bring a rescue or two.’

NELLIE was playing Beatrice that night at the Haymarket to Garrick’s Benedict. After Rosalind it was the part that best suited her and that she loved the most. She got inside the character and played it from within. The spirit of Beatrice possessed her body and mind, spoke and laughed with her voice, and looked out of her eyes brimful of sportive mirth. But when the curtain fell upon the marriage of Hero and the repentant count, and on the amorous railings of Beatrice and Benedict so cunningly entrapped, poor Nellie was instantly herself again, restless and anxious, ready at any risk to save her friend—for Roderick O’Connor, she still insisted to herself, was ‘only a friend.’

She was the first of the company at the stage-door, and she had no sooner shown her face there than a sedan-chair, with two sturdy chairmen, claimed her for their own.

Glad of the chance, she stepped in without a moment’s hesitation. The bigger of the chairmen, who held the door for her, wore his collar pulled

high over his neck and his hat pulled low over his brow. He hardly waited for her directions—‘To Dr. Goldsmith’s chambers in the Temple’—before he started.

‘I know the place, madam,’ he muttered hastily, and stepped to his place behind the chair.

In a moment more she found herself borne along at a brisk pace through the roughly-paved, ill-lighted streets, the chair swinging to the trot of the bearers like a small boat in a rough sea.

The darkness and the quick motion frightened Nellie in spite of her courage. Her frank, fine nature was opposed to fear, which is often bred of suspicion. But now, when it was too late, she remembered stories she had heard of the abduction of actresses by lawless admirers. The lowering look and manner of the hulking chairman added a new sting to her fear.

She nerved herself for coming danger, and laid tight hold of a toy dagger with gold hilt that had been given her by Garrick as a memento of her first performance as Lady Macbeth.

After a long time, as it seemed to her, though it was but a short time as the clock counts minutes, she felt her bearers slacken their rapid pace. The chair was lowered to the ground and rested there.

This time it was the shorter of the two chairmen that held the door open for her.

With a thrill of relief that told her how sharp had been the strain of fear, she found by the dim glimmer of the street-lamp that they had indeed

carried her safe to Goldsmith's door. In her joy she paid the men double fare and dismissed them.

As she raised her hand to knock, she found, to her surprise, that the door yielded to her touch.

'He has left it open for me. How thoughtful!' she said, and slipped quietly through. In point of fact, our dexterous friend, Anthony Jenkins, had thoughtfully removed the lock from the door when Goldsmith had been drawn off by the bogus message of Boswell.

Poor Nellie could not see, as she passed quickly and silently through the open door, that the two chairmen, skulking in the shadow, stole as silently after her into the room.

'I've come, Oliver,' she began impetuously, as she crossed the threshold, but broke off dumbfounded to find the room empty.

The fire was still burning on the hearth, the lamp still lighted on the table; the pen, as he had thrown it down, lay across the last page which he had written.

She could hardly believe her eyes that he was not there, and glanced round the room, half hoping to see the familiar and kindly figure start from some impossible nook.

Why was he away? He must have got her note, for he left the door open for her. That certainly stuck fast in her head.

Something or somebody had called him away for a little. Perhaps he had written a message to her. She would wait.

With that she moved to the table and glanced at

the newly-written paper, setting back the errant pen in its place. At a glance she saw it was a comedy—the comedy he had promised to write for her acting. She read the last words written :

‘MARLOW (*kneeling*). Does this look like security ? Does this look like confidence ? No, madam ; every moment that shows me your merit only serves to increase my diffidence and confusion.’

She thought she found a hidden meaning in the words, and smiled to herself with a queer mingling of pleasure and pain. Then, in the quiet of the room, the foreboding that had oppressed her in the sedan-chair oppressed her again. The dead silence and the shifting shadows got on her nerves. She had that strange feeling everyone has known, though she saw nothing and heard nothing, that there was someone close by who watched her unseen, and she feared to listen or look round.

‘He will not be long,’ she said at last, speaking aloud for encouragement and starting at the sound of her own voice. ‘I will sit by the fire and wait for him.’

As she moved from the table on which the lamp stood towards the fireplace, a huge moving shadow fell in front and crossed and mingled with her own.

Then she turned and cried out, but the first note of her cry was stifled on her lips by a silk handkerchief crammed tight against her mouth ; her arms were pinned to her sides by a second tight-bound handkerchief ; a third was knotted round her ankles.

Before she could cry or struggle she was dumb

and helpless. Staggering to her feet, she tried to run, tottered, and would have fallen, but two men wearing masks laid hold of her on either side.

‘There is no harm meant you,’ said the bulkier of the two in a low voice. ‘Though this seems rough usage, ’tis kindly meant. You will be loose and free in ten minutes from now and softly and tenderly used. To struggle can only hurt yourself and delay your liberty.’

Her pent breath strained her lungs in the wild, vain effort to cry out. The tight-drawn bands hurt her wrists and ankles. Again she started to run, and again the two men caught her as she fell and held and lifted her, moving towards the door.

‘Gently,’ said the big man. ‘The chair is in the shadow of the porch and the door still open. I’ll double the pay I promised.’

But a different payment was waiting for them at the door.

Goldsmith had met Beauclerk on his way to Johnson’s lodgings, and from him he learned the Sage had gone down to Devon for a month’s quiet. Laughing good-humouredly at the hoax, the kindly poet came carelessly home again. He was just in time to stumble through the open door on the two men carrying a lady from his chambers.

While he stood a very picture of amazement, with eyes and mouth open, the smaller of the two men, with a cry like a cur disturbed at a bone, dropped the girl’s feet, tugged out his sword, and lunged recklessly at him.

But the Irish spirit in Goldsmith was instantly alert at the touch of danger. He swerved from the threatening sword-thrust, and, leaping within his guard, closed with his opponent, pinning him in a grip of steel.

Short and muscular, at close quarters Goldsmith was a dangerous opponent.

With a grip and trip learned as a boy on the wrestling-fields of Roscommon, he lifted and flung the ruffian thud on his back, his right arm under him.

The naked sword dropped from the bruised hand and clattered across the room. But the fellow kept his grip on Goldsmith, who, in his turn, held him down, shouting for help.

‘Keep your hold for a moment, Jerry!’ cried the burlier villain, dragging the girl roughly towards the door.

‘Help! Murder!’ roared poor Goldsmith, struggling hard to free himself from the tangling grip of the man beneath him.

There was an answering cry at the door.

‘Halloa there! Is that you, Doctor, that cries out? Help is coming!’

Goldsmith and Nellie both knew the voice.

It seemed her captor knew it too.

‘That young cub again!’ he muttered under his breath. ‘This time he shan’t escape me.’

With that he flung the form of the helpless girl on the ragged sofa and drew his sword, and thrust shrewdly at Roderick, who came rushing into the room so recklessly that he almost spitted himself on the point.

As he leaped back his foot struck against the weapon on the ground, and in a moment it was in his hand.

Tony Jenkins, lunging fiercely again, was met by a parade so quick and strong that it almost wrenched the hilt from his grip and sobered him instantly.

‘You have learned to hold a sword since we last met, my young buck,’ he growled, ‘but I’ll whip you from your schoolboy fence before I’m done. Ha! Would you?’ For Roderick answered the threat by a thrust in carte so swift and true it taxed the bully’s utmost skill to parry it.

At the clang of steel Nellie had tottered to her feet, leaning for support against the wall, all her soul in her staring eyes. Her colour came and went as blade clashed upon blade ever sharper and more fiercely, and lunge and parry followed so quick upon each other that the eye was dazzled by the glint of the clashing steel.

The fierce spirit of the fight was upon her now; her breath came quick through dilated nostrils, her panting bosom rose and fell. Fear, hate, triumph swept in turn over her expressive face and blazed in her eyes. Never on the stage was passion so passionately displayed.

Goldsmith’s prisoner, waiting his chance, suddenly loosed his hold, writhed himself free, and fled. The sturdy poet was thereupon about to rush to aid his friend, but Roderick waved him back.

‘There is no need,’ he cried confidently. ‘I am the knave’s master.’

With a sudden chill of terror, the bully knew he spoke the truth. Roderick's silk waistcoat was invulnerable as a breastplate of steel, so perfect was his defence. Jenkins could not touch him once, while ever and again his darting blade slipped past the swashbuckler's cunningest guard, and pricked him here and there on arm and breast and shoulder.

Behind the black mask a cold sweat broke out on his cheek and forehead and trickled to the chin, for Jenkins knew that Roderick played with him. That deadly sword would reach his life when its master chose. The dastard knew no mercy and hoped for none. He had slain men in his mood with as little remorse as a cook kills a chicken. He had meant to slay Roderick, believing him to be at his mercy. Now Roderick would slay him. That he never for a moment doubted. An awful fear gripped his very vitals and loosened his joints. His sword-hilt shook in his nerveless grasp. A hundred times he felt the agony of death in the fell extremity of his fear.

Again Roderick's point shot in and just stung him on the shoulder. Pain and fear together made him mad. With a yell he hurled his sword full at his opponent's face, and made a wild dash for the door.

Roderick swerved only just in time to let the sword go by. He felt the windy swish of the whirling steel as it flew past his ear and crashed against the wall not a foot from where Nellie stood, still bound and helpless. But his eyes had never left his craven foe. Before the clattering steel had struck the wall, he dealt the coward a blow with the flat of

his sword upon the cheek that brought him stumbling on one knee to the ground. Then, as he struggled to his feet again, with threatening blade Roderick forced him slowly back from the door till he stood flattened against the wall, the sword-point at his breast.

With his left hand Roderick tore away the mask and disclosed the evil face of Anthony Jenkins, distorted with terror, the cheeks and brow ashen pale and daubed with sweat, the eyes protruding, the lips half apart, showing the sharp white teeth, like a famished wolf at bay.

Suddenly the craven's knees gave way, and he collapsed on the floor in a limp heap, whining for mercy. In his abasement the wretched creature kissed his victor's feet. But Roderick spurned him aside, as one might spurn a toad.

'Begone,' he cried, 'lest I be tempted to soil my sword with your blood.'

Hardly realizing even yet that his life was safe, the huge coward tottered to his feet and slunk to the door with a backward look over his shoulder. At the door he knew himself safe at last, and malignity took the place of fear.

'Curse you!' he growled, shaking a huge fist at his victor. 'I'll be revenged on you yet.'

Roderick turned at the sound of his voice, and for the first time saw Nellie standing by the wall close to the door with burning eyes fixed on him in rapturous admiration.

As he stood there, motionless as a statue in his surprise, handsome, strong, brave, victorious, his

eyes looking into hers, the truth flashed in upon her heart. In that instant the woman knew she loved and was beloved. Then, swift upon the knowledge came remorse for the kindly friend to whom her faith was pledged, and who was already by her side, loosening the bandages from her wrists and ankles. She quenched the flaming admiration in her eyes for the young conqueror, though she could not stifle the burning passion in her heart. He stood aloof, made shy by his great love. So it was Goldsmith's hands that untied the handkerchiefs that gagged and bound her. It was Goldsmith that afterwards saw her safely to her home.

With a few words of thanks, gracious but cold, from Nellie, poor Roderick departed disconsolate.

Goldsmith, indeed, had been most fervent in his gratitude, and on their night walk through the city to her home he took Nellie gently to task for unkindness to his godson.

'You were very stiff and cold to the poor lad, Nell,' he said, 'who risked his life to save you. Indeed, it was not done like yourself. I fear you do not love him as I could wish. For my sake, you must be good to him.'

CHAPTER XIV

BLIND LOVE SEES

'Tis sweeter for thee despairing
Than aught in the world besides.'

AFTER all that had come and gone Nellie shyly shrank from seeking Goldsmith's aid, as she had purposed, to save Roderick O'Connor from a debtor's prison. Yet she knew that the danger was more urgent than ever, that the humiliation to which he had been subjected—even the unmerited mercy he had received—would make the brutal Jenkins all the more fierce and urgent in his pursuit. Still, she felt she could not appeal to the man to whom she was plighted, for aid for the man she loved.

So she resolved to make her appeal instead to Roderick to save himself by flight.

She had been cold and formal in her manner—chillingly cold—when he called to inquire the morning after their exciting experience at Dr. Goldsmith's lodgings, and he had gone away crestfallen. All the more was he overwhelmed with surprise and delight when of her own accord she accosted him pleasantly a few nights later in the green-room of the theatre.

‘Dr. Goldsmith,’ she said, ‘has sent me tickets for the exhibition of pictures newly established. He is, as you know, the very good friend of Sir Joshua Reynolds, the first president of the new academy, who, it is said, has many fine pieces there.’

Roderick bowed, wondering what was coming.

‘I should like much to go,’ Nellie went on quickly and nervously, her eyes on the ground, ‘but care not to go alone. My mother, unhappily, is not for such shows, so I have made bold to beg your escort, if your business does not call you elsewhere at two o’clock to-morrow. In your company, as I have good reason to know, I am quite safe.’

She saw his eyes brighten in undisguised delight at the thought of a few hours alone with her. In her heart there was the guilty consciousness that she shared his joy. But she eased her conscience by the assurance, ‘’Twas for the first time and the last.’

‘Miss Vaughan,’ he said, with a bow, ‘to obey your slightest wishes now and always is the business and the pleasure of my life. I am wholly at your service.’

They were a well-matched couple—gay, handsome, debonair—in the bright springtime of youth that passed that sunny afternoon through the portals of the new academy.

For a long hour they wandered together amongst the pictures and prattled of their beauties, ‘tongue far from heart,’ while all the time he was eager to show his love and she as sedulous to hide hers.

She paused at last with a little cry of genuine

admiration in front of Sir Joshua's now famous portrait of 'The Fortune Teller,' then scarce dry from the painter's brush.

'Is she not lovely? Saw you ever aught so lovely?' Nellie whispered to her companion, as they stood close together before the immortal canvas.

But he turned just for a moment his eyes from the dusky beauty of the pictured face in front to the more lovely living face beside him, and his eyes, as he looked, answered her question.

'Even Sir Joshua,' he said softly, 'cannot rival Nature's masterpiece.'

For an instant, in spite of good resolve and self-control, her eyes spoke their answer to his. In the infection of his passion she felt her resolution dissolve and slip away from her, and rushed nervously to what she had come to say to him.

'It was not to see the pictures I came with you here to-day. I have matter of urgent moment to speak about—matter that most directly concerns yourself and your own safety. Can you find some place where we can speak in private?'

It was not easy to find, but when they were seated at last in a solitary corner, remote from the throng, she spoke again, hurriedly, abruptly, without giving him time for a word.

'Mr. O'Connor, I believe you are deeply in debt?'

The question took him completely by surprise. It brought him back with a shock from the roseate region of sentiment to the sordid reality of everyday life.

He was silent for a second in the extremity of surprise, and she went on again without giving him time to reply.

‘Oh, you must not think me meddlesome or impertinent,’ she entreated. ‘I heard of this some days ago without any questioning on my part. I heard at the same time that you had a malignant enemy who was determined to make your debts the means of your ruin; that he was busy buying them all into his own hands that he might imprison you without hope of release. That is why I have ventured to speak to you so freely.’

By this time he had steadied himself for his reply.

‘Miss Vaughan,’ he said a little stiffly, but it was the stiffness of passion restrained, ‘I hope I need not say that I am deeply grateful for the interest you are kind enough to show in my affairs. You have heard truly. I was very wild and reckless for a time, and made many debts. I can pay them all with a little time. I trust you are mistaken in believing that I have an enemy that would use me so cruelly. But if it be so, I have made my bed, and must needs lie on it.’

‘Indeed, indeed, I am not mistaken,’ she said earnestly. ‘I want so much to save you. It was that which carried me to Dr. Goldsmith’s lodgings the night you bravely rescued me. I wished to consult him how you might be saved.’

‘You did all this? You risked all this for me?’ he cried, the question of his danger wholly forgotten in the joy of her confession.

‘We must not talk of that now. I wanted to

save you. I want still to save you. I have thought of nothing else since that dreadful night.'

In her excitement she was losing her self-control. Her eyes told him how dear he was to her, and his heart warmed to bolder love in their glowing light.

'Dear lady,' he said, 'you alarm yourself without cause. I have no such enemy.'

'You have, you have. When I tell you that his name is Anthony Jenkins you will believe me. If he hated you before, you may guess how he hates you now. He will stick at nothing to ruin you.'

'I care not if I am fortunate enough to have won your pity.'

'No, no; be reasonable. Such talk is the merest folly. You must leave the country at once. It is a short run to France, and they say Paris is a gay resting-place for young gallants. Once there, you are safe till, in time, the debts are paid.'

'I will not budge an inch,' said Roderick doggedly.

He was unreasonably angry that she wished him away.

'But you must—you must!' she entreated. 'For your sake, for my sake, you must!'

'For your sake there is nothing in the world I would not do.'

'Do this, then.'

'Oh, Miss Vaughan, you tempt me to speak plainly what I feel it is unfair, unmanly, to speak at such a time. I love you; you must know that I love you with every pulse of my heart. I had the unhappiness to offend you once, and I have striven by patient silence to win back your pardon. But

I can be silent no longer. May I hope to carry your forgiveness and your pity with me into exile? May I hope that some day—I will be very patient and long-suffering—but in the dim future may I hope for something more than pity and forgiveness?’

She turned her head away, trembling, blushing, powerless to speak. But he gently forced her to meet his gaze, and in her eyes he read the truth that her love was already his.

In an instant his passion blazed up beyond restraint. He caught her to his heart and kissed her hard, and she for one moment gave herself unresistingly to his embrace. She had no power to resist. The passionate pressure of his lips thrilled her with delicious shame just for a moment. But she struggled bravely with the languor that mastered thought and will as she lay for that moment passive in his arms. The next she drew herself free with a strength that surprised him. He was frightened at his own boldness.

‘Can you forgive me?’ he murmured, humble and ashamed.

‘I forgive you,’ she answered very softly, ‘but this must never occur again. I wish I could forgive myself as easily. You did not know what I knew.’

‘I love you and you love me,’ he insisted. ‘That is the only thing worth knowing.’

He would have caught her to his arms, but with hands and eyes and voice she repelled him.

‘No, no! Never again! The next time I will not forgive. My love is not mine to give. I am pledged—solemnly pledged—to another.’

‘I care not,’ said Roderick recklessly. ‘Your love is given; it is mine! You must not deny it; you cannot deny it.’

‘I will keep my word,’ she said simply. ‘Love or no love, I will keep my word to the last. It is not fair; it is not manly, it is not what I hoped from you to urge me further. You would not if you knew his name whom you would have me wrong. The best, the kindest, the truest, and most unselfish of men! Can you tell him by this description?’

‘You do not mean——’ He faltered, for the truth began to dawn on him.

‘I do—I do! Your godfather and best friend has asked me to be his wife, and I have promised him.’

For a moment he was silent in utter dismay. Then the strong passion of love bore down all else before it.

‘And if it be so,’ he cried, ‘your love is still mine. You wrong him to marry him without love.’

‘I love him,’ she answered, ‘I admire him, I respect him. I believe him to be the best of men. I will make him a true and loving wife.’

‘Nay, you cannot,’ he persisted, ‘wish it as you may. You do not love him, nor can he love you as I love. You are the first that ever——’

He stopped short, abashed by sudden remembrance.

‘Indeed!’ she interposed with sudden sharpness. ‘Rumour speaks of one Mistress Caroline.’

‘Then Rumour is a liar for her pains!’ he answered recklessly. ‘I never loved her, because I never

knew her. I believed her true and pure, as you are true and pure. I found her false as an alluring devil. She swore she loved me. She pledged her faith to mine with all the holy vows of Heaven. Within an hour of that pledge I found her in the arms of another, and she laughed my reproaches and my love to utter scorn.'

'And you would make me such a one as she?' cried Nellie, with such a sudden blaze of anger that he shrank from her almost in fear. 'I, too, have pledged my faith to a man, nobler, truer, greater than you can ever be. But, as Heaven is above, I will keep my faith inviolate.'

Her voice was broken by a sudden sob, but she held the tears back bravely. In a moment she took a softer tone.

'Roderick'—she dwelt on the name—'do not let us quarrel at this our last meeting. The past is dead; we must bury it; we must learn to forget it. I appeal to your honour, to your manhood, for forbearance. I am but a weak woman, and I know my weakness. Do not, for love's sake, if you love me, tempt me to that that would shame me to my life's end, that would break my heart with shame. Do not, for your friendship's sake, urge me to break faith with your best and truest friend. I will not ask you again, for your own sake, but for mine and his you must go. Promise me to go.'

After a brief pause he raised her unresisting hand to his lips and kissed it.

'I promise you,' he said. 'Within a week I will be in France, never to return.'

‘ You will write me one line that I may know you are in safety ? And now, good-bye.’

Her voice was clear and steady, but the man’s ended in a groan as he murmured :

‘ Good-bye, my love—good-bye for ever !’
And so they parted.

CHAPTER XV

THE CAPTURE

‘A devil in everlasting garment hath him—
A back fiend, a shoulder clapper, one that countermands
The passages of alleys, creeks, and narrow lands,
A hound that runs counter, and yet draws dry foot well,
One that before judgment carries poor souls to hell.’

POOR Roderick strove to keep his promise to his lost lady-love, but for good or ill Fate was too strong for him. In three days his preparations were complete. He paid some small debts quietly to his poorer creditors, and got his baggage ready for a long absence. To his chief friend, Goldsmith, he did not venture a word ; he would write to him, he told himself, from France. Honest Captain Coolaghan, with whom he had struck up a close acquaintance after the duel, was his aide-de-camp in all those affairs, and accompanied him on the day of his departure to Dover. It was the dusk of the evening when they slipped out quietly from their hotel. All had gone well with their plans ; liberty was already in sight. But Anthony Jenkins had not been, as they fondly hoped, blind or deaf to their doings. He had heard of the payment of those

small debts ; his suspicions were aroused. He hurried on his preparations, and contrived to complete the legal formalities just in the nick of time.

So it chanced that as Roderick, with the faithful Captain Coollaghan still at his heels, was about to step on board the Dover packet, a big, heavy, dirty hand was laid on his shoulder, and a hoarse voice, with a strong Jewish accent, whispered in his ear :

‘ Sorry to disturb a gentleman on a holiday, but business is business, and I’ve got something most particular to say to you.’

In front another big bailiff, with a long Jewish nose and an ingratiating grin that showed a broken set of big yellow teeth, blocked the gangway to the boat, which was already edging off slowly from the quay wall.

Poor Roderick stood dumfounded and unresisting, but our honest captain, who had had experience, grasped the situation in a moment.

‘ You’re nabbed. Dodge ! jump ! bolt !’ whispered the stanch Irishman in the ear of his bewildered friend. ‘ Leave me to deal with these rascals.’

But Roderick shook his head, and yielded to his rough captors as lamb to the slaughterer.

It may be that in his innermost heart he was not sorry that Fate was too strong, and broke his promise in spite of himself.

‘ Where to ?’ he asked the fellow that had captured him.

‘ To London,’ the bailiff answered, with a grin, ‘ if you have no better engagement. Mr. Isaac’s,

94, Curicle Street—nice, comfortable house, and the best of noble company.’

‘ ’Tis a sponging house,’ whispered the honest captain ; ‘ I know the man.’

All four went back to London. No. 94 proved a large house, standing back a little from the street, with heavy bars at the windows and a great coronet of spikes round the walls of the yard. Within it was gorgeous, dingy, and dirty.

The two friends—for the honest Irishman still stuck fast to Roderick—were shown into a large, dark parlour. The sideboard was crammed with silver, unpolished, the floor with a Turkey carpet unswept. There were pictures on the walls with heavy gilt frames much tarnished. The silk brocade that hung at the windows and covered the sofa and spindle-legged chairs was frayed and soiled. From an adjoining room came the sound of bawling revelry.

‘ Can I write from here ? ’ whispered Roderick to the captain, while a stout, over-blown and bulging, but still good-looking, woman, in silk dress, diamond brooch, and curl-papers—the wife of the respected Mr. Isaac—waited for their orders.

‘ Ask for a bottle of wine and some paper, and give her a guinea,’ whispered the captain.

Roderick promptly put the guinea into Mrs. Isaac’s dingy hand, on which sparkled half a dozen rings, and with a complacent smile she departed on her errand. She returned presently with an open bottle and two wine-glasses caught together in her right hand, and a single sheet of paper and envelope between the finger and thumb of her left.

Bequeathing the bottle to the captain, Roderick sat down at a handsome table, with many discoloured little circles on it from the bosses of wet wine-glasses, and wrote to Nellie Vaughan a deliberate lie.

‘DEAR MADAM’ (the letter ran),

‘I write this on the eve of my departure for France. By the time it reaches your hands I will be safe and free. May God always prosper and guard you !

‘Ever, dear madam,

‘I remain,

‘Your faithful, humble servant to command,

‘RODERICK O’CONNOR.’

He fastened the letter with a wafer, of which there was a box ready on the table, and handed it to Captain Coollaghan.

‘Do you know Miss Helen Vaughan ?’ he asked.

‘Do you mean the murdering actress woman ?’ queried the captain.

‘Nonsense, man !’ Roderick retorted, caught between anger and amusement by the grave face and voice of the captain ; ‘you don’t know what you are talking about. She is the gentlest and most beautiful of God’s creatures.’

But the captain gravely shook his head in solemn pity of Roderick’s innocence.

‘I know what I am talking of well enough. I’ve got the evidence of my own eyes and ears to go by. It is not often I trouble the playhouse. Shillings are not over-plenty with me, and a glass of good

wine is more in my way than play-acting. But one night last month I was down on my luck, and I went to see a Scotch play called "MacBeth" for a laugh. I made sure of a tune on the bagpipes, at any rate, but there was nothing but murders from beginning to end. 'Twas like reading a chapter of the Newgate Calendar to listen to them, and your Miss Helen Vaughan was the worst.'

'But that was only the play.'

'Faith! that was the queer play. I don't envy them if that's their notion of amusement. It was poor fun to a chap they called Banquet, whose ghost turned up to dinner with a hole in his head you could put your fist into.'

'But it wasn't real, man.'

'Begad! it was a deal worse than the reality, then. I've seen some real killing in my day, and killed a man or two myself in fair fight, and it never troubled me; but I dreamt of that woman's awful face and voice for a week. It sent a cold shiver down my back—that white face of hers, with two big, staring eyes. Her whisper was enough to freeze your blood. Faith! I don't envy old Mac, the husband, whom she was always putting up to some mischief or another.'

Roderick was laughing by this time; his anger had evaporated.

'She won't bite, captain,' he said; 'you may take my word for it.'

'I won't give her the chance.'

'Nay, but you must. I want you to go again to the playhouse, and put this letter into her own fair

hands. If she asks you nothing, say nothing ; but if she questions you, you must tell her you saw me on board the packet for Dover.'

'Very nearly—not quite.'

'Quite ! you must say quite.'

'But why the lie ?' queried the captain. 'I can tell a lie as well as any man to serve a friend, but I don't see how this one can serve you.'

'She might worry about me if she knew I was in prison, and I don't want her worried.'

'Oh, that's it, is it ?' said the captain. 'I see now.'

He said not another word, but filled himself a bumper of good Madeira into a glass, and, with 'Here's to your speedy release !' tossed it off at a gulp and departed on his errand.

That night, when 'Hamlet' was halfway through, Captain Coollaghan sent Roderick's letter by the uninviting stage-attendant, with a request that he might see the lady.

The attendant, who left growling, returned smiling.

'Yes, Miss Vaughan would be delighted to see the captain. This way, please.'

He stumbled through a series of ropes and disordered rolls of scenery in the dark continent behind the stage.

The attendant stops at last, turns a door-handle that creaks as it turns, and the bewildered captain finds himself suddenly in a blaze of light.

As he stands blinking like an owl in daylight, he is gradually aware that he is in a lady's dressing-room, brilliantly lighted with a dozen candles in

sockets with wire cages. A row of dresses hang on pegs round the room. On the dressing-table are paints, brushes, and a large basin and jug, and beside it a full-length mirror that reflects the light dazzlingly. Facing him with the open letter in her hand is a figure that takes his breath away. She is clad in a single flowing robe of pure white caught in at the waist, but loose at the bosom. On her head is a disordered wreath of flowers. Her dishevelled locks of red-gold hair fall below her waist. Her lovely face is very pale, and her large blue eyes gaze on him wistfully.

The captain stood stock-still, like one that sees a ghost. For the moment he believed that it was a ghost he saw.

‘Well?’ cried the clear voice impatiently.

He gathered his wits together.

‘Beg pardon, my lady,’ he said; ‘I was brought here in mistake. It was Miss Vaughan I came to see.’

‘Yes, yes; I’m Miss Vaughan.’

‘You’re not Miss Vaughan; you’re not the Lady Macbeth I saw the other night.’

She smiled, in spite of her impatience.

‘Not to-night; I was when you saw me. I’m Ophelia to-night, but I’m Miss Vaughan always. What about this letter? You must hurry to tell me, for I will be called away to the stage presently. Was he well and strong when he sailed? The letter only tells me he is safe.’

‘Well,’ he answered deliberately, ‘the letter is a lie.’

‘A lie!’

‘Ay, just.’

‘I’ll not believe it,’ she cried indignantly; ‘I’ll not believe that he wilfully deceived me—that he broke the promise he gave me. You are a false friend to say so.’

‘I’m a true friend to say so, and he is a true man that writes. The letter is a lie sure enough, but it is more to his credit than the truth.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Take it easy. Don’t fly out like that, me girl, at a man old enough to be your father, but just listen to me here for a moment. Roddy did his level best to get away, I helping him; but he was nabbed just as he was putting his foot on board the boat. They carried him off to a sponging-house. You never heard of the like, maybe? Well, it’s a place where——’

‘Go on, go on! I can guess; it’s a debtors’ prison.’

‘If it’s not that, it’s the next door to it, anyway. Well, it was in a sponging-house that letter of yours was written. He wrote the lie because he didn’t want to worry you. I tell you the truth in the hope you may know some friend to help him, though, upon my conscience, I believe the lad would think nothing of putting a sword through me for telling it.’

‘What’s the amount of the debt?’ asked Nellie.

‘There, that’s the business,’ said the captain admiringly. ‘One hundred and seven pounds eighteen and ninepence—say one hundred pounds even money. I’ll manage the seven eighteen nine

myself, if I have to pawn my sword for it. Do you know any friend, miss, that will stump up ?'

'Perhaps ; I cannot tell now. Oh, I hope so—I hope so. But I must go now. Here is my address. Call early to-morrow morning.'

'Ophelia, the stage waits,' cried a voice at the dressing-room door ; and she went by the bewildered captain, and disappeared a flicker of white in the dark passage.

The next moment there was a roar of applause that seemed to shake the theatre, and in the dead silence that followed he heard a sweet, sad voice singing :

' They bore him bare-faced on a bier,
Hey no nonny, nonny, hey nonny,
And in his grave rained many a tear.'

PART II

CHAPTER XVI

THE RANSOM

‘ Though loving maid the lavish lover prize,
And gifts make love more precious in her eyes,
Yet still doth she a livelier joy partake
Who sells her trinkets for her lover’s sake.’

CAPTAIN COOLLAGHAN was faithful to his appointment next morning.

He found Nellie and her mother together in the sitting-room. The girl was dressed for the street; she greeted the captain cordially.

‘ I see yourself at last,’ he said, with an old-fashioned bow and a look of honest admiration in his weather-beaten face. ‘ For Lady Macbeth I had fear, for Miss Ophelia pity, but for Miss Vaughan——’

She cut short his elaborate compliment smilingly, though her eyes had an anxious look in them.

‘ Nay, captain, I must not have a declaration at such short a notice. This is business, as you reminded me last night. You know the adage, “ Business first and pleasure afterwards ” ?’

‘ It will be my greatest pleasure in life to be of the smallest service to Miss Vaughan.’

‘And your friend Roderick O’Connor?’

‘’Pon my soul, I had almost forgotten Roddy,’ cried the incorrigible captain. ‘When beauty——’

She lifted a warning forefinger.

‘Captain Coollaghan,’ she said, ‘I know you mean it kindly. You mean to make little of the trouble. But I am in sad, serious earnest, and you will help me best and please me best if you will be serious too.’

The captain was instantly penitent.

‘I never meant it,’ he began hastily.

‘Oh, I know you meant nothing but what was kind, and your kind heart will, I am sure, forgive my plain speaking. Mother and I have this morning gathered our few valuables together. They are there’—she pointed to a little glittering pile of old-fashioned trinkets on the table—‘and I have twenty pounds saved in gold as well.’

Theatrical salaries were not in those days what they are now. Garrick was not prodigal nor Nellie mercenary, and both regarded eight pounds a week as a splendid income for a young actress. From this she had put by two pounds a week for an emergency, and now the emergency had come.

‘And you wish me——’ began the captain, and hesitated.

‘You must not be angry with us. We thought that perhaps you might know where—that you might know how to dispose of those trifles for us to the best advantage.’

‘Do I understand, ladies,’ said the captain very

gravely, 'that you are ready to sell your trinkets to get Roderick O'Connor out of a scrape?'

'Quite ready,' answered Nellie.

'And anxious,' added the mother, smiling.

'Then all I can say is,' and he glanced significantly at Nellie as he said it, 'debts or no debts, sponging-house or no sponging-house, Roderick O'Connor is the luckiest dog in London.'

'Oh, it's not that,' cried Nellie impetuously; 'you must not think that. Mother knows it's not that. But he saved me once from a great danger at the risk of his own life, and I am not ungrateful.'

'I humbly beg your pardon, Miss Vaughan,' said the honest Irishman, but his suspicions were not wholly allayed.

They were rekindled presently. As he turned over the little pile of trinkets on the table, apprising their small value with the skill of the expert, the glitter of fine diamonds caught his eye. He picked out a handsome ring that was half hidden in the heap. Brand-new and valuable, it was such a contrast to the rest that the captain's lips were shaping themselves for a whistle of surprise when Nellie touched her own with her finger-tip and glanced significantly at her mother.

The captain coughed discreetly, and jangled the trinkets on the table, answering Nellie's gesture with a wink so significant, and withal so good-natured, that she blushed furiously, and spoke hastily to hide her confusion.

'Captain,' she said, 'we want to get money for these things.'

‘That is simple enough, miss,’ he answered; ‘the difficulty is the amount.’

‘But we don’t want to sell them, you know. We want to keep the chance of getting them back again. Is there any way that can be managed?’

‘Oh yes, there is a way.’

‘And you know it?’

‘Oh yes, I know it—very well. It is not a way particularly pleasant for ladies. But I’ve had experience, Miss Vaughan. I have been put to strange shifts in my day. If you ladies will trust me with all these pretty things, perhaps—— But I’ve no right to say that. You know nothing of me, and I have been told by several dear friends that I look exactly like a highwayman.’

‘You look exactly like a gentleman,’ cried Nellie; ‘you would be a gentleman in rags—an honest Irish gentleman.’

Her words, voice, eyes completed the enslavement of the amorous Irish heart that even age could not cool. From that time forward he was her devoted slave.

‘Of course we trust you,’ she went on coaxingly; ‘we brought you here to trust you and thank you afterwards. Did we not, mother?’

‘I had little to do with bringing, Nell,’ said the old lady, smiling, ‘but I trust the captain as you do.’

‘Why, mother, you are quite as anxious to get Mr. O’Connor out of prison as I am.’

‘Quite,’ the mother assented, but the captain doubted it.

Nellie guessed his doubts.

‘I have to start now for a rehearsal,’ she said quickly. ‘Perhaps, captain, you would give me your company for a little way?’

‘With the greatest pleasure in life,’ cried the captain, with one of his finest bows. Then she gathered up the trinkets from the table with both hands, and swept them into the captain’s huge pocket, and passed out of the door he held open for her.

With another profound bow that was wasted on the blind lady the captain followed.

‘Will they be enough?’ Nellie asked anxiously when they found themselves in the street. ‘They are very precious to us; they belonged to my mother’s mother, but I fear they are worth very little money.’

‘Did the ring belong to your mother’s mother?’ asked the captain dryly, sly humour twinkling in his small eyes.

‘No, the ring belonged to—the ring still belongs to Mr. O’Connor.’

‘I guessed it.’

‘Then you had no right to guess it. Of course you think that he gave the ring to me; but he didn’t. I tell you I never got the ring from him. He just dropped it, and—and——’

‘And you picked it up?’

She faced the situation frankly, though there were tears of vexation in her eyes.

‘Captain Coollaghan,’ she said, ‘please don’t tease me any more about the ring. Please don’t hint that Mr. O’Connor and I are lovers. Don’t

even think it, for it's not true. It hurts me, and I know you don't want to hurt me. Now listen: I'll trust you altogether. I have promised to marry Dr. Goldsmith—the famous Dr. Goldsmith. You must have heard of him ?'

'Heard of him, Miss Vaughan ! I've sat with him, I've talked with him, I've drank with him. He's the greatest poet alive. If any man deserves you he's the man. I'm a blundering old ass, and deserve to be kicked.'

'You are a true-hearted gentleman, and deserve to be kissed, and if we were not in the street——'

Then Captain Coollaghan said he was sorry they were in the street.

Presently Nellie asked shyly.:

'Do you think the ring very valuable ?'

'I should say twenty or thirty guineas,' said the captain, 'if the stones are real.'

'Oh ! the stones are real,' she answered quickly, with a little pang of admiration at the splendid recklessness of poor Roderick, who had let them lie in the kennel where she had thrown them.

They parted at the corner of the street, for the captain was anxious to set about his errand, and Nellie was overdue at rehearsal. As he watched her go down the street, stepping as lightly over the rough pavement as a red deer over an Irish hillside, he felt a new pity for his young friend in the sponging house.

'Poor Roderick, my poor lad !' he muttered under his breath, 'it's hard on you, very hard.'

The captain returned with his spoils in the after-

noon only a few minutes after Nellie had got home from the theatre. He shook the money out gingerly on the table. He had got fifty-nine pounds and some odd shillings in all. His own signet-ring and big silver watch had gone to swell the total. He gathered twenty-seven gold coins on the table in a little heap by themselves, and joined his finger and thumb in a thick circle to indicate a ring. Nellie knew his meaning. The ring had brought in that sum—more than all the other trinkets together—the ring that for her sake Roderick had let lie in the gutter.

But even with the money she had saved they were still nearly thirty pounds short of the amount wanted.

‘I will have to ask Dr. Goldsmith after all,’ thought poor Nellie, and hated the thought.

But to Captain Coollaghan she said cheerfully :

‘It will be all right, captain—I am sure it will be all right. If you can call to-morrow afternoon, I hope to have the whole sum ready with a thousand thanks for your great kindness.’

CHAPTER XVII

A FRIEND IN NEED

‘Neither a borrower nor a lender be,
For loan oft looseth both itself and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.’

POOR Dr. Goldsmith, though Nellie did not know it, was himself in sore straits. By one of those coincidences common in real life, incredible in fiction, he was arrested for debt the very morning after O'Connor's arrest. Ever free with his purse when he had money, and with his name when he had none, he had signed a bill for forty pounds for a needy, and, as it proved, a worthless friend. It was the old story. The friend assured him it was the merest form, and he accepted the assurance. Three months later he was called upon to pay. The friend had vanished into thin air. He paid what he could—thirty pounds—and renewed the bill for twenty pounds. But when the demand was made, three months later, for that sum he could pay nothing. He asked for time, and the creditor's reply was to arrest him as he sat at breakfast in his own chambers.

The humiliation of the bailiff's touch on his

shoulder, the sense of personal indignity, hurt his sensitive nature. When a man is in love all thoughts and feelings spring from his love, or revert to it, like radii to the circle's centre. Poor Goldsmith's first vexing thought, as the bailiff's heavy hand was laid on his shoulder and his hoarse voice sounded in his ear, was 'What would Nellie think of me?' In his simple modesty he could not guess that she would think the better of him for the easy generosity which had run him into this trouble for friendship's sake.

The burly bailiff proved, in spite of coarse face and hoarse voice, to be an honest, good-natured fellow enough.

Being accommodated with some bread and cold meat, and a mug of strong beer, at a small table in a corner of the room, he willingly gave 'the gentleman time' to send round to his friends.

'It is easier arranged here,' he said, 'than from a sponging-house, and cheaper.'

Goldsmith despatched a messenger to Dr. Johnson at Johnson's Court, begging him to come alone, as he was in serious trouble. Leaving his untasted breakfast on the table, he set himself at the window to watch for the coming of his friend. Nor had he long to wait. Within an hour he saw Johnson's huge, ungainly figure come rolling down the street like a three-decker in a heavy swell. Within twenty paces of the door the sage pulled himself up with a jerk, went back as far again, and advanced deliberately, placing his feet with great care. After a dozen steps, however, he again stopped, retired,

and came on the third time more slowly than the second. This time he got safely to the door, and very deliberately put his left foot first over the threshold.

‘Why, Goldy,’ he began as he entered, ‘what’s all this about?’ Then his eye caught sight of the big man who sat in the corner of the room on the extreme edge of a chair, bailiff written in every line of his heavy face and figure, and he knew without telling what it was all about. He made a kind of blowing, whistling noise, which in the next century was imitated by a steam-engine letting off steam. ‘I knew some misfortune was impending,’ he cried, ‘before I set foot over the threshold. Twice my foot crossed the irregular lines that demark the boundaries of the pavement as I approached your residence. This occurrence has ever boded misfortune to me.’

‘Surely, doctor,’ exclaimed Goldsmith, ‘you don’t believe in such silly nonsense!’

‘Sir, the incredulity of ignorance is too apt to ridicule what it fails to understand. The universal testimony of all ages and nations establishes the reliability of omens. That testimony, we must assume, was inspired by experience. The Romans, after they had attained a high degree of civility, regulated their conduct by such anticipations of futurity. The apparently accidental flight of wild-fowl decided the foundation of Rome. By the characteristics of the intestines of animals lately deceased great wars have been instigated or prevented. Such indications are not intrinsically more

important than those which you have wantonly derided. Shakespeare, though in some respects a very much overrated poet, was a man of singular sagacity. He very wisely puts into the mouth of the royal and learned philosopher Hamlet the dictum, "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy." "

'But do you really believe in omens?' cried Goldsmith, half forgetting his trouble in his surprise.

'Sir, I have a mind open to evidence and capable of conviction. A single occurrence can never be accepted as an equivalent for the conclusive demonstration of long and continuous experience. But every grain added to a mound of sand increases the weight and volume of the mass. Therefore I would have you to observe that on this occasion the occurrence of the inauspicious omen immediately preceded the discovery of the misfortune.'

'But, doctor, you might have guessed that I was in trouble when I sent for you in such haste.'

'Why, here, sir, you are illogical. The sequence and connection between omen and misfortune were quite independent of my foreknowledge or conjecture.'

'But still, doctor, the omen was for you, and the misfortune was for me,' said Goldsmith a little impatiently, and he glanced at the bailiff.

'Sir, the misfortunes of my friends are my misfortunes,' cried Dr. Johnson, the superstitious and

pedantic sage instantly relapsing into the shrewd and kindly man of the world. 'You should know me well enough by this time, Goldy, to know that. What is the amount of the debt? How came you to owe it?'

'Twenty pounds,' Goldsmith answered. 'I signed a bill for a poor fellow of my acquaintance. He was sorely pressed at the time, and he promised to pay it when it came due.'

'The necessity,' quoth Johnson, 'which is occasioned by self-indulgence does not scruple to relieve itself by mendacity. Benevolence divorced from prudence is apt to become the promoter of improvidence and the protector of fraud.'

'Benevolence,' interposed Goldsmith slyly, 'appealed to by repentant folly is ever ready with prudent advice and practical assistance.'

For a moment the moralist, thus cut short in the midst of a ponderous homily, trembled on the balance between annoyance and amusement. Amusement carried the day. He broke into a shout of laughter that shook his huge frame.

"A hit, a very palpable hit," as our friend Shakespeare says. It is not often, Goldy, that you get so clean past my guard. But if I prolonged admonition I will expedite relief. The sum for which you are in durance I have by me at my lodgings. In half an hour it will be at your service.'

'Nay, doctor,' cried Goldsmith, much moved by his prompt kindness, 'I trust it shall not be needed. I have completed a story which I believe is worth at least the money for which I am detained, if I

could have your aid and recommendation with the booksellers.’

He drew from a cupboard, as he spoke, a big pile of manuscript in two bundles, tied at the corner with string, and set it down on the table before Johnson, clearing away the breakfast things to make room for it.

The manuscript was hastily, but not illegibly written, with surprisingly few alterations or erasures. Instantly the uncouth, slovenly philosopher settled himself comfortably in a big high-backed chair, dropped his oak cudgel and cocked hat upon the floor beside him, and plunged into the manuscript. A grotesque figure he seemed, with a wig perched comically on the top of his huge head and his long-tailed, brown body-coat trailing almost to the ground. But his massive face wore the solemnity of a judge, and the poor author watched him as earnestly and as pleadingly as prisoner awaiting his sentence.

“The Vicar of Wakefield,” grunted the sage approvingly; ‘a good title—reminds me of Lichfield. “I was ever of opinion,”’ he muttered, rapidly reading, “that the honest man who married and brought up a large family did more service than he who continued single, and only talked of population.” A good opening sentiment, Goldy, and well put too, but why don’t you practise what you preach?’ Without waiting for an answer from the embarrassed poet he plunged into the perusal of the book, and puffed and blowed, and snorted and chortled as he read.

The author's face cleared as he noted Johnson's growing satisfaction. He devoured the manuscript (never was word more appropriate) with prodigious rapidity, now and again merely glancing down a page, and again turning two leaves at a time, but missing nothing of special importance in plot, dialogue, or character.

'Tis a pleasant piece of work,' he said, as he turned the last page, and let the second bundle of manuscript tumble from his hand on the table. 'Your philosopher Burchell in the book is prodigiously well drawn, a good-natured fellow, yet could be stern on occasions. Bozzy will swear you got that model from me. I care not if you did, for I like the picture. Your Olivia and Sophia are agreeable wenches enough. I marvel where you got the sitters for their portraits, Goldy?'

The sensitive poet blushed at this home question, but the near-sighted moralist never noticed.

'A pleasant piece of work,' he repeated self-complacently, 'and not unlikely, in my judgment, to attain to an ephemeral popularity, though it be denied the permanent place in the literature of the country to which a classical correctness of diction and accuracy and profundity of learning alone can pretend. The butterfly is gayer, but more short-lived, than the elephant; the flower brighter, but less enduring, than the oak. Your book may make "the perfume and suppliance of a minute—no more."'

'If it prove the suppliance of the present necessity,

I ask for no more,' retorted Goldsmith, smiling rather ruefully. 'Do you think the booksellers will let me have twenty guineas for it?'

'I think they should if my recommendation and their own self-interest may prevail, but present parsimony is too often the enemy of prospective advantage. I will carry the manuscript, as your ambassador, to that rascal Newbury, and return within an hour with the result of my negotiations.'

Within less than an hour he was back, puffing, blowing, and triumphant. He carried in his hand a small bag of chamois leather, from which, making a funnel of his huge hands, he emptied the clinking, glittering stream of guineas on the table.

'Sixty,' he said, as he rounded them into a symmetrical little pile with his hands.

'Splendid!' cried Goldsmith, delighted; 'it is double what the story was worth.'

'Why, no, sir,' retorted Johnson. 'By such statement you disparage your own literary ability, my critical appreciation, and Mr. Newbury's commercial sagacity. It is not double the value of the work, but it is a very sufficient and even generous remuneration.'

'I have yet another favour to ask of you, doctor,' said the hospitable Goldsmith, elated at the sudden possession of such wealth—'that you will dine with me this evening at four. Garrick is coming, and Burke, and Sir Joshua, and, I believe, Beauclerk.'

‘ May I carry Bozzy with me ? I have promised him my company for the evening, and he is a burr not easy to shake off.’

Hospitable Goldsmith made a wry face like one that swallows a pill, and answered politely :

‘ With much pleasure.’

CHAPTER XVIII

GOLDSMITH'S LIGHT GOES OUT

‘I will not claim your hand without your heart,
Nor make your faith the tyrant to your love.’

So it happened that when Nellie called at Goldsmith's chambers on the early afternoon of the same day he was out completing his preparations for the banquet of the evening. But as he had left word that he would be back within half an hour, she waited. She made a pretty picture in that dim and dusty old room, looking the more dainty and delightful set off by the background of confusion and disorder, like a gay, brightly-plumed bird in a rough thicket. She was excited, too, and restless as a bird. Her conscience troubled her. Already half seduced by her love, it whispered doubts if it were fair to Goldsmith to hide the secret of her heart from the man she meant to marry. Was he not entitled, it hinted, to know all, to decide for himself? She would keep her pledge, of course, if he still wished it, but——

In her innermost heart she knew this was an evasion to escape from duty to love. She knew the generous nature of the man; she knew that to tell

him of her love for Roderick O'Connor was to be relieved from her pledge to himself. He would abandon his hope ; he would, if need be, deny his love to secure her happiness. She felt it was mean to listen to the voice of the tempter, but the tempter tempted all the more, and love, speaking in the disguise of conscience, almost prevailed.

Restlessness and excitement drove her from her seat, and sent her pacing up and down the room. Her walk brought her by chance to the poet's writing-table, where manuscript lay scattered about in most admired disorder.

With a start, she saw amongst the papers a sealed packet addressed to herself. Then conscience and curiosity had a sharp tussle. 'It is addressed to you ; you have the right to open it,' pressed curiosity. ''Tis not sent,' conscience urged ; 'he has still the power to withhold it.'

Curiosity conquered ; she broke the seal.

Within she found a little leather case, with a small gold brooch prettily wrought in the form of a shamrock, and this verse :

'A TRIBUTE.

' No lines of empty flattery these ;
 My pen sincerest truth obeys.
 I know to praise is not to please,
 And yet I cannot choose but praise.

' Let other bards their rhymes rehearse,
 And lay, like servile suitors, down
 The flattering tribute of their verse,
 Where only beauty wears the crown.

- ‘ I do not love the flower that gives
 No sweetness to the summer air,
 Nor beauty love that only lives
 To be and be reputed fair ;
- ‘ Whose senseless splendour cries aloud,
 “ Behold how beautiful am I !”
 Hot sun without one gracious cloud,
 Dumb stream without its lullaby.
- ‘ Fair face I love that doth confess
 Its owner not more fair than good ;
 That tells of truth and tenderness,
 Of pure and gentle womanhood.’

Tears fell upon the page as she read. ‘ How good he is !’ she thought ; ‘ how tender ! how true ! He imputes his truth to me, and loves me for it. I will try hard to be worthy of him ; I will keep my pledge, and keep it cheerfully. It is an honour for which I should thank God on my knees that such a man should love me.’

When Goldsmith returned a little later he found her there to welcome him, with the open packet in her hand.

‘ I have stolen your gift, Oliver,’ she said gaily, ‘ and your poem. You can have the brooch back, if you must, but not the lines.’

‘ When you had stolen my heart, Nell, there was nothing left for you to steal,’ he answered tenderly. ‘ All that I have and am are yours.’

She did not answer for a moment, and his eyes, made keen by love, read trouble in her face.

‘ What is it, Nell ?’ he asked. ‘ You have come

to tell me something ; you have come to ask me something. Can I help you in any way ?'

'It is not for myself,' she answered ; 'your godson——'

'Roderick—yes ; what of him ?'

'He is in trouble ; he has been arrested for debt by that man Anthony Jenkins.'

'The amount, Nell—do you know the amount ?'

'It has been all made up except thirty pounds.'

Goldsmith drew a great sigh of relief. 'Thank God,' he said, 'it is no more ; I have the money by me.' Then he laughed a little nervously. 'Nell,' he asked, 'what would you think if I had been arrested for debt ?'

'When it happens I'll tell you,' she said, laughing.

'Tell me now, my dear ; it has happened. I was arrested this morning ; I have only been released an hour ago. Are you not ashamed of me, Nell ? It was different with Roderick. Youth will have its fling, but I am old enough for good sense, prudence, and respectability.'

'You are not too old for reckless generosity,' she cried. 'Mr. Garrick has told me of your doings, and Dr. Johnson, and Roderick. Why were you arrested ? Oh, you need not answer me ; it was your generous heart that got you into trouble, and I love you the better for it—indeed, indeed I do.'

'Nellie,' he answered very humbly, 'you are too good to me. How can I ever deserve the gift that God has sent me in you ?'

'Begin by telling me the whole story,' she

answered, with a twinge of remorse at his unsuspecting love.

While he told her the story of the arrest and rescue, she kept on repeating to her own heart, 'I will keep my pledge to him. I will make him a good wife; he shall never know the truth—never, never.'

'Story for story,' he cried gaily when he had finished. 'Now tell me of Roderick.'

He started when she inadvertently mentioned the amount of the debt for which Roderick had been arrested.

'I thought you said thirty pounds, Nell.'

'Thirty was all that remained to be made up. We — that is, Captain Coollaghan and myself — managed the rest between us. We hoped to manage it all without troubling you, dear.'

'Nell, Nell,' he cried, 'Captain Coollaghan is a good soul, but he is as poor as a church mouse, and as reckless as a young rake—more likely to make debts of his own than to pay other men's. You paid this great sum yourself for my godson for my sake.'

Her conscience gave her another sharp twinge, remembering how little was done for his sake.

'I had a few pounds saved, and a few trinkets that Captain Coollaghan disposed of. He told me he had a dear relative that lent money on such things, and kept them safely.'

Poor Goldsmith knew the same dear relative only too well.

'But, Nell, Nell,' he objected, 'a few pounds and

a few trifling trinkets will not make up twenty odd pounds.'

'But there was Roderick's own diamond ring,' she cried impetuously—'the most valuable of all.'

The words were no sooner spoken than she repented them. She stopped short blushing, and tears of vexation started into her eyes.

Her embarrassment was too plain to escape the notice even of simple, unobservant Goldsmith.

'His own diamond ring, Nell?' said Goldsmith slowly. 'How came you by his diamond ring to dispose of? Did he send it you by Captain Coollaghan?'

'No, no,' she faltered; for she felt his eyes fixed upon her face, and some power other than her own will seemed to constrain her to speak. 'Roderick offered it to me a long time ago, and I would not have it, and flung it from me in the street, and he let it lie where it fell, and I picked it up next morning. But he would not have it again, and so I kept it for him, and had it when it was needed to raise money for his release. Was it not fortunate, Oliver, that I kept it for him?'

She tried to speak lightly, and raised her eyes for the first time as she asked the question to his; but they drooped before the grave sadness of his earnest gaze.

For a moment neither spoke, and Nellie, in that intense pause, could hear the beating of her own heart—so hard it beat.

'So Roderick loves you,' said Goldsmith at

last. 'Nell, you should have told me of this before.'

'I did not wish to trouble you,' she answered. 'Tis but a boy's love ; 'twill pass.'

'Do you wish it should pass ? Look me in the face ; deal fairly with me, Nellie. Do you love him in return ?'

He strove hard to steady his voice, but the agony in it touched her to the heart.

'No, no,' she cried passionately, 'I don't—I swear to you I don't. I love you, and only you. I will keep my promise ; I will be a good, true, loving wife to you always.' And she knelt beside him, and hid her face in his bosom, sobbing softly.

But the very passion of her denial betrayed the truth.

'My poor Nell !' he said—'my poor, dear little girl!'—and he stroked the golden hair tenderly, pityingly, as he spoke—'you love him, not me. I am not vain enough to think it could be otherwise. I am not selfish enough to wish it were otherwise. How my poor little girl must have suffered ! Why didn't you come to me, Nell ? Why didn't you tell me everything ? You might have known me better ; you might have trusted me. Could you think I would let you spoil your life for my sake ?'

'I love you, I love you !' she cried again through her tears. 'I will keep my troth to you.'

'Nay, I know better, Nell. Youth loves youth, and beauty loves beauty ; I was a fool to dream it could be otherwise. You cannot keep your pledge to me, Nell, for I refuse to have it. Let

it ease your conscience that I am the pledge-breaker. You cannot marry a man against his will, Nell, and, knowing what I know, I would refuse you even at the altar. Nay, look up and smile, my dear, and forgive your inconstant lover. I will still play my part—the father, not husband—and give the bride away. Don't flatter yourself I will break my heart, for I won't; I will dance with the best of them at your wedding, if it be not too long delayed.'

She looked up at him through her tears, and saw him smiling.

'He doesn't care,' she thought, with a queer little pang, in which disappointment mingled strangely with relief.

'Oh, I am so glad you take it like that! I feared you would——'

'Would break my heart over it? No, Nellie; old bachelors' hearts are not so easily broken. I will not be so badly off either; I will still have my pipe and my bottle and my book, and you will love me a little always, won't you?'

'I will love you the best in all the world.'

'Except—nay, if you blush so, I will not name him. But we have forgotten his present state too long. Here is the thirty guineas that is wanted to ransom your captive knight. Better still, I will go myself.'

'It does not need. Captain Coollaghan is ready waiting for me.'

'That will be best; the captain is a campaigner of experience. Besides, I have an appointment to dinner that I had forgotten. Now go, my dear.

I doubt you will have happier news for Roderick than the news of his release. My goodwill and blessing go with you to him, and stay for ever with you both.'

He parted so cheerfully that she could scarcely credit that the ordeal was over and she was free. With her joy there still mingled the faint suspicion of disappointment and regret. Was there ever any joy since the world began of perfect flavour?

She had suffered so much, she thought, as she went gaily down the sunlit street, to keep her pledge to Goldsmith, and he had cared so little to lose her. But this thought was but a little puff of petulance that passed. Great joy speedily absorbed all other feeling. Now, at last, she could love and be loved without reproach, and could give her lover a double gift—his liberty and her love.

But poor Goldsmith sank wearily into a chair as she passed from the room, and the smile died out of his face.

To the poet's soul joy and sorrow alike are more vivid and more keen than to the common man. He has a finer sense of pleasure and of pain. Imagination is given him for alternate delight and torture. The joy of love had flooded his soul with rapture; the agony of loss overwhelmed him. His dreams were so real, so lifelike, that it was as the pain of death to lose them. He harboured no hope of the future. He had loved but once in all his life, and he knew he would never love again. The joys of love and home, the dear name of husband and father, the tender endearments of children, never could be his.

He must walk henceforth the long, straight, dull journey of life alone.

As Nellie turned the street-corner, half piqued, half comforted by the assurance that he did not care in the least, the poor, deserted poet covered his homely face with his hands and sobbed like a lonely child.

CHAPTER XIX

THE RETALIATION

‘ This is the right fencing grace, my lord :
Tap for tap, and so part fair.’

COMMONPLACE every-day life will not pause in its jolting jog-trot to sympathize with the grief of a love-lorn poet. It is just as well that small pleasures and small cares should dull the edge of a great sorrow. Poor Goldsmith presently remembered the guests he had bidden to dinner, and roused himself to fittingly discharge the duties of hospitality.

The dinner was, in the main, brought in from a neighbouring eating-house. But there were a number of bottles of rare old port and Madeira—a gift from a titled friend—which Goldsmith carefully uncorked with his own hands.

Johnson was the first to arrive, hungry and surly, with Boswell bustling in his train. Garrick came next, alert to his finger-tips, kindly too, but disposed to court especial notice to his own doings and sayings, to take the stage, and spoil his best points by over-emphasis. A moment later Burke and Sir Joshua Reynolds arrived together, both easy, graceful, natural ; the child-like good-nature

of the great painter tempered with dignity in the great statesman. Beauclerk strolled in languidly a quarter of an hour after the rest, and was roundly rated by the hungry moralist for his want of punctuality.

‘Sir,’ said Dr. Johnson, ‘as punctuality in social engagements is a crucial test of good breeding, its neglect must be equally reprehended, whether it arises from the languid selfishness of the polished egotist or the clownish rudeness of the uncultured boor. Now, Goldy,’ he added, ‘let us to dinner. We have tarried too long;’ and he led the way, without more ado, to the table.

Garrick, behind Johnson’s back, grimaced like a flogged schoolboy, with a malicious look at Beauclerk, who shrugged his shoulders contemptuously. But Boswell, who had listened with open ears and eyes and mouth to the wisdom of the sage, surreptitiously entered the rebuke in his note-book.

There was little talk at the earlier stages of the meal. Johnson was wholly absorbed in eating and drinking, and the others were silent in deference to the Great Mogul of conversation. Garrick, however, darted an occasional joke at Goldsmith, who sat beside him.

The moralist ate and drank prodigiously. He fairly chortled with delight when a dish of venison came upon the table, and bent greedily over his full plate that he might shovel the unctuous morsels more easily and more rapidly into his mouth. The veins on his forehead swelled as he ate; a perspiration broke out over his face, and

he gave vent to strange, inarticulate mutterings of delight.

At length the ardour of his appetite was satiated. He drank a full bumper of port, and lay back with a kind of rolling motion in his chair, waiting for the opportunity of delivering some sentiment of high moral wisdom.

The opportunity was instantly supplied by his watchful jackal Boswell.

‘May I inquire, sir,’ he said respectfully, ‘if you regard the indulgence of the amorous passion as calculated to increase or diminish the happiness of the individual?’

‘Why, sir, that is an unskilful interrogation, and, in its present form, incapable of accurate reply. If by the amorous passion you mean the instinct of propagation, it is a necessary element in the maintenance of conscious life, and must not on this account be profanely questioned. But if you mean that overpowering animal magnetism by which, if we can credit the lubrications of the amatory poets and the occasional imbecilities of our personal acquaintances, persons of diverse sex are irresistibly attracted to each other, then, to adjudge the proportion of discomfort and felicity in the experience, it is essential both to investigate the idiosyncrasies of the individual and to ascertain the ultimate issue of their infatuation.’

Boswell’s face was a study as Johnson rolled out this sonorous reply. He had exhausted his notebook, and was now, with a mental strain painful

to watch, endeavouring to commit the big words to memory.

Persently, on some pretext, he slipped from his place at the table and stole slyly to Goldsmith's writing-table, irresistibly attracted by the sight of pencil and paper.

He had made his note, and was returning unobserved to the dining-table with the appropriated pencil and book, when his eye lit on a lady's glove on the floor, where Nellie Vaughan had inadvertently dropped it.

With the prying curiosity and malice of a magpie, he picked up the glove and laid it ostentatiously on the table-cloth before Goldsmith.

'I think this is your property, doctor,' he said, with a smirk. 'I found it on the floor.'

Garrick burst into a shout of laughter that even Johnson's presence could not restrain.

'A find! a find!' he cried. 'We have now got the chance to "investigate." How does it read, Bozzy? Oh, to be sure, "To investigate the idiosyncrasies of the individual, and to ascertain the ultimate issue of the infatuation."'

The sentence was delivered with a delightful mimicry of Johnson's voice and manner which the sage himself alone failed to notice or enjoy.

'Tell us all about it, Goldy,' went on the irrepressible Garrick. 'Who is she? What is she like?'

'Judge from her glove, Davy,' Goldsmith answered, with undisturbed good-humour.

'You are answered, Davy,' said Johnson. '*Ex pede Hercules; ex manu Venus.*'

' 'Tis a pretty five fingers if this glove fits,' drawled Beauclerk.

'Nay, I shall not be so fobbed off,' cried Garrick with irrepressible vivacity. 'I think we are bound to help our Goldy towards the "ultimate issue of his infatuation."' I propose that we devise for him a love lay to the fair unknown, a candid poem which his own modesty would forbid. We must nothing extenuate or aught set down in malice. Two lines apiece is no extravagant contribution to friendship.'

'You carry the joke too far, David,' said Burke, whose fine nature could sympathize with the feelings of the sensitive poet, in spite of Goldsmith's unabated good-humour.

'Nay, sir,' said Johnson, 'you must not set too sharp restraint on innocuous vivacity. *Dulce est dispicere in loco*, and the present is such a place and occasion. Goldy is not the man to be captivated by feminine fascinations, still less to pretend to feminine favour. Our exercise will, therefore, lack the element of personality which alone could constitute an offence. I will myself contribute the inaugural lines :

' Unskilled in amorous fantasy till now,
To Cupid's subjugating yoke I bow.'

Garrick chimed in instantly :

' I fool's cap wear, who erst have taught the school ;
The boy is master now, the master fool.'

Beauclerk was still fiddling with the slim glove, of which he retained possession. Possibly he guessed

the name of the owner. Now, on a call from Garrick, he drawled out :

‘ This modish damsel, judging from her glove,
Must scorn the stammering of a rustic love.’

Boswell, meanwhile, had been scribbling assiduously, tearing up slip after slip. At last he drew himself together and read, with conscious pride :

‘ If Goldy venture to pursue the fair,
His face and manner will his suit debar.’

‘ You might, at least, have rhymed, Bozzy,’ interjected Garrick.

‘ The reason is more important than the rhyme,’ Boswell answered petulantly.

‘ No, sir,’ thundered Johnson. ‘ As reason is the essence of prose, so rhyme is the essential of verse. There is no obligation to express our sentiments in metrical numbers, but to attempt it and fail is to prove that ambition exceeds capacity. Your lines should rather run :

‘ If Goldy ventures to pursue the fair,
Reluctant nature counsels to forbear.’

‘ Come, come,’ said Reynolds, ‘ I think we are carrying the joke too far. It is hardly fair to our host.’

‘ What if Goldsmith should retaliate ?’ asked Burke. ‘ I fancy some of you would regret your temerity.’

‘ A match ! a match !’ cried Garrick. ‘ I, for one, am ready to stand the shot of his wit.’

‘ And I, for my part,’ added Boswell patronizingly,

‘ would be pleased to hear poor Goldy try what he can do in the way of retort.’

‘ Come, Goldy !’ Johnson interposed, with imperious good-humour. ‘ ’Tis a fair challenge, and releases you from the restraints of hospitality. As I inaugurated the aggression, I demand I shall be the first target of the retort.’

With a humorous smile lurking in the corners of his kindly mouth, Goldsmith bent over a scrap of paper and wrote rapidly with a stumpy pencil.

‘ You read, Davy.’ he said, passing the written paper to Garrick, who read in a voice that was the very echo of Johnson’s :

‘ Of love in ponderous phrase I make demand,
Entreaty taking accent of command.
I roll my interrogatory song
Of am’rous polysyllables along,
And woo confiding in deserved success,
Whose soft endearment is the bear’s caress,
With knees inflexible and voice uncouth,
As wooed the mammoth in creation’s youth.
If rough morality and learning please
Thy heart, Zozina, I can offer these.’

As Garrick, to whom copious bumpers of port had given courage, read the burlesque verse with exaggerated imitation of Johnson’s voice and manner that set the table in a roar, the sage himself grew red in the face, and puffed and rolled, and seemed about to break out into an explosion. But he remembered that he had both provoked and challenged the retaliatory lines. He saw, too, that though Boswell seemed shocked by the profanity

of an attack on his patron, the sympathy of the rest of the company, especially of Reynolds and Burke, was wholly with Goldsmith. So he contrived with many gulps to swallow his rage.

‘Pretty well, Goldy!’ he cried, ‘though I could mimic my own style more accurately. I can console myself for your parody in the knowledge that excellence is ever the most tempting target for burlesque. Your turn next, Davy,’ he added, for Goldsmith was again scribbling busily.

‘I have waived my claim, sir,’ Garrick answered, ‘in favour of Beauclerk.’

‘Well, well, Beau deserves a flagellation.’

‘And has got it,’ muttered Garrick, glancing over the lines passed to him by Goldsmith.

Then he read, with a keen appreciation that gave vigour to the verse :

‘In gallantry, not love, I take delight
(Distinction wide apart as day and night) ;
Well dressed, well spoken, bright and debonnaire,
I make a wholesale conquest of the fair.
The fickle passion that I misname love
Slips on and off as easy as a glove ;
With heartless ease ’tis still my pleasing part
To break when I have gained the fair one’s heart.
And this, so you mistake my false for true,
I promise, dearest, to achieve for you.’

Only Boswell laughed this time, as Garrick sent the point of the lines home with his voice. Johnson rolled like a dancing-bear in time with the rhythm of the verse and snorted approval. Burke and Reynolds looked as men look when well-deserved chastisement is skilfully administered, their satis-

faction dashed with some faint sympathy with the victim.

Beauclerk at first affected unconcern, but he felt the eyes of the others on his face, and flushed in spite of himself, and he clenched his hands tight and bit his lip hard like a man in pain.

Yet, when the lines were ended, and silence followed, he leant over to Goldsmith, to whom he sat next on the other side of the table from Garrick, and whispered :

‘ You have hit me hard, but no harder than I deserved. I shall remember.’

‘ Very good, Goldy—very good indeed !’ said the irrepressible Boswell. ‘ Now give Reynolds his turn, and don’t forget the snuff and the ear-trumpet.’

Goldsmith was a little longer with the next paper, and re-wrote two of the lines over before he passed it to Garrick.

The verse took music from the changing music of that incomparable voice.

‘ Let short-lived beauty cease from vain complaints :
It conquers time and death when Reynolds paints ;
Lives in his art for all the world to see,
And glad the eyes of ages yet to be.
With gentle heart in lovely face confessed,
Lives ever at its brightest and its best ;
Goodness and beauty join by his command,
Whose hand can paint, whose heart can understand,
For never yet since first our race began
Virtue and genius more ennobled man.
Can beauty, then, resist his righteous claim
Who asks for love in recompense for fame ?’

There was a murmur of applause round the

table, for kindly, genial-hearted Sir Joshua was a universal favourite. He himself was plainly touched to the heart. There were tears in his eyes, and his lips quivered as he raised to them a brimming glass of port with a gracious bow towards the poet.

‘Your health, old friend,’ he said gently. ‘I thank you not so much for the flattery as for the friendship that prompted it.’

‘’Tis Burke’s turn next,’ Garrick cried impatiently. ‘Kindly put a little pepper in his sauce, Goldy, if you love me, or you will have too much left for mine.’

But Goldsmith was already writing, and this time his pencil flew over the paper.

Garrick snuffed disconsolately as he gave a preparatory glance over the lines, but he read them with appreciative force :

‘The age of chivalry is still alive,
While gallant, noble-natured Burke survive,
To clamour deaf, intolerant of wrong.
In him the weak have found a champion strong,
With more than ancient eloquence endowed,
To awe the mighty and enthral the crowd ;
With steadfast gaze before and after cast,
To shape a glorious future from the past.
Sure when that noble nature claims from strife
The soothing solace of domestic life,
The proudest fair may humbly count her blest
To hold that weary head upon her breast.’

Johnson glanced a little irritably from Burke to Goldsmith as the lines were read, plainly thinking the eulogy were more appropriate to himself.

Boswell sniffed scornfully. Burke smiled and shook his finger at the poet in playful depreciation of the praise.

‘Why, this is not the candid, but the candied friend!’ cried Garrick. ‘Goldy, Goldy, you have exhausted the language of panegyric. How can you hope to do justice to my merits—and ’tis my turn next, unless Bozzy here claims precedence?’

He spoke lightly, but there was a note of nervousness in his voice. Plainly he was not eager for his turn. But Bozzy was not impatient either.

‘I am content,’ he said, with the pomposity of a small man, ‘to verify the proverb, “Though last, not least.”’

He manifestly plumed himself on the neatness of the retort, and looked to Johnson for approval. But Johnson was not in the approving vein.

‘Lay on, and spare not, Goldy,’ he cried. ‘Davy has deserved his castigation. He that loveth his child chastiseth him, that he may rejoice in his latter end.’

‘That’s not the usual effect on his latter end,’ muttered Garrick ruefully.

When Goldsmith would have handed the actor the paper to read Johnson again interposed.

‘Nay, sir, you must not ask Davy to lay the lash on his own back with his own hand. That were a task too hard for his fortitude. “Give me the dagger.”’

Then, with manifest gusto, he read the lines :

‘ Both off and on the stage I play my part,
Assume the lover, simulate a heart ;
I daily shift and change to prove my wit,
And capture noisy plaudits of the pit.
To love’s sincerity I make no claim,
For love to me is nothing but a name.
It mars the actor’s part to be sincere ;
We’ll play at loving, if you please, my dear.’

Garrick’s chagrin got the better of him for an instant.

‘ I’ll be even with you for that !’ he snapped out, with an angry glance at Goldsmith. But the next moment his better nature triumphed in the man. ‘ Your health,’ he cried genially. ‘ You see, I kiss the rod, and hope you will not refuse me friendship though you deny me love. But ’—with a dexterous change of the subject—‘ there’s Bozzy still eager for immortality.’

‘ ’Tis Goldy’s function to afford us amusement, not immortality,’ said Boswell sententiously.

‘ We will let the little man pass,’ Goldsmith whispered to Garrick.

But Boswell heard, and puffed himself out with the comical wrath of a cock-sparrow.

‘ Nay, nay,’ he cried. ‘ I have had my shot. I flatter myself I hit the mark, and do not shirk reprisals—

“ If Goldy venture to pursue the fair,
Reluctant nature counsels to forbear.”

Let the company judge who shoots the straighter.’

‘ You see, he will have it,’ whispered Garrick.

Goldsmith wrote rapidly, smiling as he wrote. But even then he would have torn the paper he had written, but Garrick snatched it from him, and read, giving keener sting to the verse by the malicious mockery of his voice :

‘ To catch the public eye I only care,
A monkey on the shoulder of a bear ;
For notice still I make my restless claim,
And notoriety mistake for fame.
I flatter, fawn, and follow as I can
The worthless shadow of a worthy man
With all the small man’s vanity elate,
When by my littleness I prove him great.
By turns obtrusive, frisky, pert or sly,
All ladies love a lapdog : here am I.’

‘ In faith, you have stuck a needle in the lapdog’s cushion,’ said Beauclerk.

‘ ‘Ware teeth, Goldy,’ counselled Garrick. ‘ Those small dogs bite shrewdly.’

Boswell laughed noisily.

‘ I protest I am amused,’ he said. ‘ ‘Tis not the pointless malice of futile envy that can depreciate the——’

He was stumbling for a word, when Johnson’s great voice boomed out and drowned his querulous tones.

‘ Nay, sir,’ he said ; ‘ if the lines are spiced with wit, they are likewise flavoured with truth. Profit is often won through pain, and the verse should incite you rather to improvement than resentment. The true function of satire is——’

What the true function of satire, according to the gospel of Johnson, is, the world shall never know, for at that moment the landlady came suddenly into the room with the announcement :

‘ A young lady wishes to see Dr. Goldsmith.’

CHAPTER XX

DEAR GOLDSMITH

‘For it so falls out
That what we have we prize not to the worth
While we enjoy it.’

THERE was a moment’s silence at the abrupt announcement of ‘A young lady to see Dr. Goldsmith.’ Then the shrill voice was heard of Boswell, who had been too assiduous in his attentions to the port.

‘A young lady for Goldy. Let us have her in ; she will make us sport.’

He caught Johnson’s angry eyes fixed on him, and cowered in his seat like a frightened schoolboy.

‘Hold your tongue, sir,’ roared the enraged moralist, ‘till at least you have learned to observe the common conventions of good breeding.’

‘Dr. Goldsmith,’ he added with grave courtesy, ‘perhaps ’twould best suit your convenience that we should retire?’

‘By no means,’ Goldsmith answered hastily. ‘The lady is in the next room ; I partly guess her errand. I will return in a few moments. Meanwhile the man is my enemy who spares the bottle.’

Dr. Johnson will kindly take my place in my absence.'

'The lady of the glove, doctor?' asked Beauclerk roguishly.

'I believe so; I hope so,' Goldsmith answered with frank good-humour, as he passed from the room.

'Egad! he finds his wooing easier than we fancied,' said Beauclerk, as the door closed behind Goldsmith. 'I wish the girls would run after me in the same fashion.'

'The women like wit, Beau,' Garrick answered, 'and Goldy has enough and to spare. For my part, I will meddle no more in his love affairs. I smart for it yet. Had I thought he had been so valiant and so cunning of fence, I'd have seen him damned ere I'd have challenged him. I am glad the lines are torn, and that he keeps no copy.'

'I made a note of each verse as it was read,' chimed in Boswell the irrepressible. 'I purpose preserving them for the amusement of the public.'

Garrick made a wry face, and Beauclerk muttered a curse.

'The devil you do!' said the actor; 'your own amongst the rest, I suppose?'

'Certainly; 'twill interest my friends, and cannot hurt my reputation. For my part, I like to hear honest Goldy rattle carelessly away.'

''Tis said,' muttered Johnson, 'that the prick of the sharpest steel is but an agreeable titillation to the tough epidermis of the rhinoceros. Our Bozzy is similarly fortunate.'

‘Pray, sir,’ queried Boswell, starting off at a tangent with perfect innocence and good faith, ‘do you consider the rhinoceros or the hippopotamus more nearly allied to the mammoth?’

Johnson, remembering the comparison in Goldsmith’s last verse on himself, grew purple with rage, and glared at his disciple, who gazed back at him with fatuous veneration, for which the wine was only partly responsible, an open note-book in one shaking hand, and a pencil in the other, ready to take down the words of wisdom as they fell from the sage’s lips.

The comical spectacle was too much for the company. They burst into a sudden shout of laughter, which fear of Dr. Johnson subdued to a silence as sudden.

It chanced that the fastening of the door of the next room had not caught when Goldsmith carelessly closed it behind him. It now swung slowly ajar, and in the dead silence they could hear the voices speaking in the other room. At first it was a mere murmur of sounds, but grew louder as the speakers became more excited.

‘Nay, there is nothing to thank for, Nell,’ Goldsmith said; ‘’twas little I could do for you or him.’

‘’Tis ever your way,’ answered a clear pure voice that they all instantly recognised—‘’tis ever your way to make little of your own goodness. You have given him liberty; you have given us both happiness.’

‘I wish I knew who the fortunate “him” is,’ muttered Beauclerk.

‘Praise from your lips is very sweet, my dear. But I must not take what I have not fairly earned. I have given a few pounds that I could well spare to help a friend out of trouble. The full sum of my merit is that I did not act like a churl.’

‘Thirty pounds is more than a few,’ Nellie answered, ‘even to a rich man, and you’re not rich. But the money is the least part of your goodness. I feel ashamed when I think of it. I have not spoken to him of it. Even now I will willingly keep the pledge I gave you.’

As the conversation went on, Boswell, from whom the wine took all notions of propriety, had noiselessly disengaged himself from his seat at the table, and moved unsteadily, note-book in hand, towards the door.

But Burke rose at the same time, and gripped his arm silently, with a look and motion so fierce that it sent him slinking back to his place like a whipped hound. Then, on cautious tiptoe, Burke crept on to the door, and softly closed it.

‘I got Goldy sixty pounds to-day for six months’ work,’ Johnson said. ‘It seems he has just squandered thirty of the amount. The smaller part relieves himself from custody, the larger delivers a friend. ’Tis idle to preach to him of providence.’

‘He has truly an unconquerable generosity,’ said Burke.

‘Why, sir, providence is also to be numbered amongst the virtues,’ retorted Johnson. ‘He cannot always have a “Vicar of Wakefield” to help him to sixty guineas.’

“ ‘The Vicar of Wakefield’ !” cried Burke. ‘ Surely, surely that masterpiece was not sold for so paltry a price ?’

‘ ’Twas an adequate—nay, a liberal remuneration,’ Johnson answered angrily. ‘ The work was not amiss, but it was trivial and ephemeral, deficient alike in dignity of style and gravity of learning, which alone conduce to permanent reputation.’

‘ You will pardon me,’ Burke replied with not less firmness; ‘ I have, by Goldsmith’s kindness, read the work with infinite delight. There is no finer story in the English language. The style is clear and pure and musical as a running stream. ’Tis a study of human nature true, cheerful, and delightful, enhanced by the genial humour and kindly nature of the man from whom virtue has praise and honour, and vice itself no harder doom than repentance, pity, and forgiveness.’

Johnson was so dumfounded at this extravagant panegyric, this flat rebellion against his literary judgment, that Boswell, ever on the watch, had a chance to get his word in.

‘ Surely, sir, you do but jest when you talk in that strain of our poor Goldy. He is an honest creature, and can write tolerably enough on a pinch, with the help of Dr. Johnson, who rescued him out of Grub Street, and whose style he can imitate after a fashion. But he would run mad with foolish vanity if he should hear your praise. What you have said of the “ Vicar of Wakefield ” were almost enough to have said of “ Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia.” ’

‘Nay, Boswell,’ said Johnson, more gently than his wont, ‘you must not be precipitate and indiscriminate. It is possible I helped to inform Goldy’s mind, and to reform his style. But it must not be denied that he has merit of his own.’

‘Say, rather, genius,’ interposed Burke warmly, ‘the rarest gift of man, and the noblest. We have a genius amongst us, gentlemen, so close we cannot see his greatness. We entertain an angel unawares. We even sometimes laugh at the man whose shoe-string we are not fit to tie. Forgive me, doctor, but, right or wrong, I speak my mind. If any of us survive our own age we will live in men’s memory as the chosen friends of Goldsmith. You have the reputation of the hour; he will have the immortality of the centuries. You speak to men’s minds, he to their hearts; you will be admired, not read, in the days to come: he will be read and admired, and, better still, he will be loved by an ever-growing circle of readers. Men and women, whose grandfathers are at this moment unborn, will smile and weep over “The Vicar of Wakefield,” and love the gentle author for his gentle book when your “Ras-selas” is no more than a hard name. His plays will be still alive on the stage when “Irene” slumbers in a forgotten corner of the library. The tender melody of “The Traveller” and “The Deserted Village” will echo through the ages to give innocent delight to countless generations. The world for all time will be the better and the happier that our Goldsmith has lived in it. Let us who live with him value our high privilege as we may.’

There was a pause when Burke had finished. The intense feeling he displayed for the moment silenced Johnson, and even sobered Boswell.

But Garrick shrugged his shoulders a little impatiently.

‘Egad! you should have been an actor, Burke,’ he said. ‘I never spoke a speech more trippingly on the tongue.’

‘I spoke my own words, Davy,’ Burke retorted good-humouredly, ‘and my own thoughts.’

‘And mine,’ added Sir Joshua Reynolds, who had listened with his ear-trumpet turned to Burke.

‘And mine,’ echoed Beauclerk, to the surprise of everyone. ‘Though I have rebelled against the thought that this ugly little man should be so much wiser, better, greater than myself, and have vented my vanity in ungrateful gibes, I never doubted the truth.’

Johnson was plunged in a gloomy, meditative silence. But Boswell, undismayed, popped up buoyant as a cork.

‘For my part——’ he began.

At that moment the door opened. Goldsmith came smiling into the room. Garrick broke in unceremoniously on Boswell’s speech.

‘For your part, Bozzy,’ he cried, ‘if you speak of the empty bottle there beside you your part is equal to the whole.’

Then the talk strayed to other topics, and jests that held truths in solution were tossed across the table, and wit laughed, humour smiled, and wisdom, dropping her airs and graces, sat with the guests as

a genial boon companion late into the night. But all the company showed throughout an unwonted deference to Goldsmith. Even Boswell was affected by the contagion of respect.

As he and Johnson went home together, the little man walking with unsteady feet, and clinging close to the big man, his smothered protest against Burke's praise of Goldsmith broke out again.

'For my part, sir,' he stammered, 'I think Burke spoke very foolishly when he asked us to bow down and worship poor, vain, muddle-headed Goldy. The worship of the Goldy Calf, I call it! Ha! ha!'

Johnson answered not a word to this sally. The uneasy question filled his mind, Was it possible that Burke was right—that Goldsmith, whom he regarded as a harmless drudge with stray gleams of talent, whom he was used to bully or patronize as the humour took him, was he after all the greater man of the two? In his innermost heart he vaguely feared that Burke was right.

CHAPTER XXI

HONOUR AMONGST THIEVES

‘ And he that stands upon a slippery place
Makes nice of no vile hold to stay him up.’

RODERICK and Nellie saw very little of each other for some time after his release. They were kept apart by shyness on his part, and on hers by something like remorse. But the warmth of mutual love soon thawed their reserve. He was now assiduous in the study of his profession. His days were spent poring over law books, or in the dull routine of the pleader's chambers. The theatre was the only relaxation he allowed himself. But he no longer ventured amid the wits and beaux in the green-room, where she was the acknowledged queen. He contented himself perforce with the delight of seeing her and hearing her, which he enjoyed in common with all who had a shilling to spare.

One evening, by a chance which was not all a chance, he was at the stage-door as she passed out. He saw her accosted with obsequious gallantry and courtesy by a tall gallant very richly dressed. He noted the look of scornful repulsion on her face when

the man persisted in pressing his attentions on her. Then, as the flaring torch held by a passing linkboy fell full on the man's face, he recognised, with a thrill of disgust, the gaunt figure and evil countenance of Anthony Jenkins. The impulse of the moment mastered him. He stepped quickly between them, shouldered Jenkins aside, and, with a low bow, offered his arm to Nellie. With a scowl and a curse the bully clapped his hand on his sword-hilt. His scowl darkened to fiercer hatred as he in turn recognised his man. Their eyes met deadly as crossed sword-blades. But the craven heart of the bully was cowed by the hot defiance in Roderick's gaze, and, still muttering curses, he slunk away into the crowd.

With a grateful smile that warmed his veins, Nellie took Roderick's arm, and they moved away together down the silent street.

That broke the ice between them. After that they gradually dropped back into their former pleasant intimacy. Somehow—he himself could never tell how, so vague were the woman's shyly-insinuated hints, but somehow he gathered that she was no longer pledged to Goldsmith. At the same time she guarded herself from any renewal of Roderick's love-suit with a dexterity he found it impossible to evade. Her defence was like the flexible, almost impalpable, chain mail of Damascus worn unperceived beneath silk or velvet, unobtrusive but invulnerable. Imperceptibly he had glided back to the old friendly intimacy; beyond that he could not go. He and Goldsmith were

often together at her rooms, and then her kindest words and sweetest smiles were ever for the poet. But Roderick, rich in the former assurance of her love, bided his time as patiently as he might.

Meanwhile Anthony Jenkins persecuted her with assiduous attentions. Letters of passionate love and jewels of great price were laid upon the table, or even pressed into her reluctant hands by bribed attendants. He haunted the green-room. She was never alone in the streets without a shuddering fear that the next moment she would find him at her side. Anger or scorn very plainly expressed failed to discourage him in the least. Remembering, with a shudder, the violent scene in Goldsmith's chambers, she feared to complain either to the poet or to Roderick, but kept her peace, hoping to wear out the persecution by coldness and contempt.

Jenkins had at first been inspired in his pursuit of her mainly, if not wholly, by his intense desire to hold Roderick clear from marriage till the fateful six months had expired. As Nellie was the girl Roderick seemed likely to marry, on her he concentrated his attentions. But gradually a fierce overmastering passion for the woman herself took possession of the man. He was resolved, with the whole strength of his will, to possess her. The thought that he would at the same time balk Roderick of the inheritance gave a fiercer impetus to his passion.

But the bright, keen eyes of Caroline, sharpened by jealousy, were on all his movements.

One day, when she had contrived to meet him

alone, she taxed him openly and boldly with his perfidy.

‘Methinks, Master Toney, that you are somewhat too hot in your pursuit of Mistress Helen Vaughan. It irks you, I can see, to give me a minute of your worship’s company. You can waste hours upon her.’

‘Nay, Carry, Carry,’ he cried; ‘do but be reasonable. I care not for the jade, believe me. I but strive to keep her from the arms of young Roderick O’Connor till the time of his probation be passed. ’Tis for your sake, my girl, I labour no less than my own.’

‘’Tis for my sake you make love to another woman! A pretty story, and likely of belief!’

‘’Tis a true story,’ he answered sulkily, ‘as you must know if jealousy did not blind you.’

‘I jealous of that painted-faced wax puppet that every man may stare at for sixpence! In good sooth, not I. But you do not keep faith with me, Toney, and that angers me.’

‘I will marry you, Carry, when the six months run out and the fortune is secure. Have I not sworn it?’

‘I care not for the fortune,’ she said more softly, with a seductive light glowing in her dark eyes; ‘I want only yourself.’

‘I will not wed you to beggary, dearest,’ he answered with an uncouth attempt at tenderness; ‘one month more is not too long to wait.’

‘No, if that were all.’

‘It is all; I swear it is all.’

‘ You do not love this actress woman ?’

‘ I love none but you, Carry. So you should keep your mind from those jealous humours, there is no woman in the world to match you. The jade is nothing to me ; she’s not fit to wear your slipper for a glove.’

‘ You write otherwise here,’ Caroline answered sharply ; and she drew a letter from her bosom.

Jenkins growled an oath out between his teeth as he recognised his own scrawling hand upon the envelope.

‘ ’Twas careless to drop it in my sight, Toney,’ she went on coolly. (As a matter of fact, she had picked it from his pocket, but that is a mere detail.) ‘ I made no scruple to read it, for all your love-letters by right belong to me.’

‘ “ My soul’s dearest idol,” ’ she read aloud in fragments, mincing the words contemptuously, ‘ “ most divine of women,” “ celestial goddess,” “ I burn with passionate love,” “ Take pity on your devoted slave ”—that sounds a little tender, does it not, Toney ?’

‘ The letter was not meant for you, and you had no right to read it.’

‘ I know ’twas not meant for me, and ’twas all the more reason I should read it. You should have known me better, Anthony Jenkins, than to play with me after so shameful a fashion. Now take the consequences. To-morrow I go to Roderick O’Connor to tell him the contents of the will. How long after that, think you, will his marriage be delayed ?’

His coarse red face grew mottled with fright at the bare thought of it. He changed instantly from bullying to cringing.

‘Surely, Carry,’ he whined, ‘you would not so wrong a man that loves you. There is nothing in the letter rightly taken that should anger you.’

‘There is much love in it—more than you give me, I doubt.’

‘Words, Carry—words only. I swear it. I aimed to wrest her from the other, not to win her for myself; a mere stratagem of war.’

‘Of love or war, Toney?’

‘Of war, Carry. Upon my soul, I hate the whole pack of them, and have got good reason to hate them. My love is all yours, my girl.’

‘I wish I could be sure of that,’ she murmured, half persuaded.

‘You may be sure,’ he protested the more eagerly. ‘I swear it by all that I hold sacred. We must keep that cub unmarried. I have tried other plans and failed. I locked him in prison, and she got him out. This is our last card in the game. Our case is well-nigh desperate. She has thrown over old Goldsmith for his sake, as you foretold. You were wiser in that than I. They are for ever billing and cooing, curse them! They may marry any morning, and then good-bye to land and coin. I try this way only because there is no other.’

‘There is another,’ she said slowly—‘a short way and a sure way.’

His interest was instantly keenly awake.

‘What is it, wench?’ he whispered almost fiercely. ‘Tell it me.’

‘To steal the will from Dr. Goldsmith.’

‘I could not; I dare not.’

‘But I can, and dare. I was a great friend of his in the old time, as you know. I was often in his chamber, and he has shown me the secret drawer to his desk. The man is like a schoolboy; he could no more keep a secret than a sieve hold water. We are no longer friends, ’tis true. He will not forgive me playing fast and loose with his godson, and he is one of those men with whom lies won’t serve. But if I can make safe means to have five minutes alone in his chambers—and I believe I can—the rest is easy.’

‘He may have opened the will and read it,’ Jenkins objected. ‘Though the will be lost, if he can swear to the contents we are undone.’

‘Oh, you dull men who lack the women’s instinct, and judge all others by yourself! *You* would have opened the will, Toney, in such a case, and so would I. Oliver Goldsmith would die first. But, to cut short objections, if I put the will with the seal unbroken in your hands within three days, what shall my reward be?’

‘I will marry you within three days more, I swear it;’ but even as he sealed the pledge with a perfunctory kiss, the thought was in his mind: ‘The will once safe in my hands, I am quit of the jade for ever.’

CHAPTER XXII

A WOMAN'S WILES

‘The seeming injured simple-hearted thing,
A virtuous gentlewoman deeply wronged.’

‘I FEAR you must have thought it forward in me to write to you, Mr. Boswell,’ said Caroline, ‘more especially to give you an appointment in my own rooms.’

Boswell smiled with patronizing benevolence.

‘I depreciate apology,’ he said. ‘If I can serve you, my recompense is in the service.’

He had from time to time picked up stray scraps of Johnsonese, which he vented in conversation as occasion offered. In his voice and manner, even to the rolling motion of his small body, there was a comical suggestion of Johnson. ’Twas as though a poodle should attempt to mimic the bark and motion of a huge, shaggy Newfoundland dog.

‘I knew I could trust your kindness,’ simpered the bashful maiden.

‘And my respect, madam,’ said Boswell pompously; ‘and I trust you will add my esteem and—ahem!—my affections.’

She guessed what was coming, but as she did not

want to be troubled just then by his affection, she switched the talk on to a new line.'

'You were ever famous for your tact, Mr. Boswell,' she said. 'All the town talks of the cleverness with which you managed a meeting and reconciliation between Mr. Wilkes and Dr. Johnson.'

'Twas a pretty piece of diplomacy,' he answered complacently. 'Garrick is not prodigal of praise, but he has said 'twould do credit to an ambassador. 'Twas a pity,' he added, 'I was not bred a diplomatist. 'Twas done in this sort, Mistress Caroline: I had long conceived the desire that those two should be friends. But Mrs. Williams did not favour the idea; she is a woman without intellectual enterprise. So I contrived——'

'Nay, I have heard the story,' she interposed gently; she had heard it three times from his own lips. 'Now I want you to do the same favour for me.'

'You want me to introduce you to Jack Wilkes?' he said. 'Beware, my good lady; he boasts that he is irresistible with your sex. "I am the ugliest man in England," he has said. "Give me but half an hour's start with a woman, and I will outstrip the handsomest. 'Twas but an empty boast made once after supper at the Mitre Hotel before a full company. I at once challenged him to the trial, but he refused, and covered his retreat with much laughter.'

'I have no desire to know your Mr. Wilkes,' Caroline said, when she could at last edge a word in; 'he is a lewd infidel, and no fit company for a

virtuous gentlewoman. To my thinking, beauty of form and beauty of mind go ever together.'

She cast a glance, half shy, half amorous, at Boswell, who puffed himself out with gratified vanity.

'I see,' he said ; 'you desire to be introduced to Dr. Johnson. I am his most intimate friend, and though he loves not the society of women, still, I might contrive——'

'I don't ask so great an honour. 'Twas with Dr. Goldsmith I was about to ask your good services.'

'Goldy !' he cried with petulant envy, remembering the scene in the poet's rooms ; 'I marvel what you women can see in Goldy.'

'I have ever regarded him almost as a father,' said Caroline calmly.

'Oh !' said Boswell, instantly appeased. 'In truth, poor Goldy is well stricken in years. He is a good-natured creature enough, though vain and foolish at times. But you know Goldy, Caroline ; why, it was he who first introduced you to me, as I remember.'

'I *knew* him,' she murmured, and her handkerchief was at her eyes ; 'but of late there has been a sad estrangement between us. He has heard stories of me from slanderous tongues, and has given them too ready credence.'

'He is indeed foolishly soft and credulous,' assented Boswell.

'I could clear myself if I had the opportunity—I know I could ; but he denies me access to him.'

‘Goldy can be obstinate when he chooses ; I know that.’

‘Then I remembered you ; I remembered your great tact and kindness. I thought I would ask you to find a way to reknit our former friendship.’

‘To be sure, to be sure. ’Twill be a simple task, I doubt not ; let me see.’

‘I would not wish to force myself directly into his presence.’

‘Of course not. Still, if——’

‘Yes, yes ; if, as you say, I could, as it were, surprise his company. But how might that be arranged, Mr. Boswell ?’

‘Of late he is busy with a new play—a trivial thing, those say who have read it in parts. He only goes forth for some hours daily at a stated time in the Temple Gardens. Now, if you were to——’

‘I knew you would help me,’ she cried in delight ; ‘I see what you would have me do. You would have me go up with you to Dr. Goldsmith’s chambers while he is abroad in the Gardens. Knowing you, they will let me wait for his return, and, finding me there alone and unprotected, he will pity me and believe me. How wonderfully you have thought the whole plan out in a moment !’

Boswell beamed at her praise.

‘Really, ’twas almost as much your own thought as mine,’ he said.

‘No, no,’ Caroline cried ; ‘the idea was yours, and it is you only can give effect to it. Shall we go at once ?’

‘It would serve no purpose. He is at home at this hour. See!’ He showed her his note-book with the jotting under the head of ‘G’: ‘Goldsmith walks in Temple Gardens daily from two p.m. to four.’ ‘We have an hour yet to spare.’

‘I am so glad! Oh, I should not have said that, should I? Besides, you may not be able to wait.’

She meant to hold him for that hour, and looked at him so artlessly and so pleadingly withal that even his well-regulated Scotch heart throbbed irregularly; and he moved a little closer to her on the sofa.

‘I am ever at your disposal,’ he gasped out stiffly, the more stiffly for the restraint he put upon his feelings.

‘The poor girl loves me,’ his thoughts ran—‘that is quite plain. I must take no unfair advantage of her innocent affection; Dr. Johnson would never forgive me if I did. I will ask his advice about the whole affair.’

Then Carry coaxed him to talk of himself and his friends—an easy task when Boswell was concerned. He told her of the dinner at Goldsmith’s room, and the interruption. She was specially interested in the words which he had overheard between Goldsmith and the lady, and which he had committed to his note-book. She made him read the extracts out for her several times.

‘But you were sure it was Miss Vaughan’s voice?’

‘Quite sure.’

‘How unmaidenly! All the town talks of her preference for young Roderick O’Connor.’

‘That is the key to her coming to Goldy’s chambers,’ Boswell answered. ‘He had released her from her pledge to himself. You know this O’Connor.’

‘I did know him. He made pretence to love me once, and I might perchance have answered his love if I had not met——’

Her downcast eyes closed the sentence, and Boswell’s heart started again from its even jog-trot.

‘When I refused him,’ she added, without giving the other time to speak, ‘he was angry, and spoke untruths of me; but I have forgiven him. Did Dr. Goldsmith also love this Vaughan woman?’

‘We thought so. We smoked him at the dinner, and made verses on his passion.’

Again he appealed to his note-book, and read the verses and Goldsmith’s retorts. His own couplet he read twice over, chuckling.

‘Johnson thought it very neat,’ he said. ‘None of us mind what poor Goldy says or writes,’ he added, as he read the pungent retorts.

Carry almost choked with suppressed laughter when he gravely read aloud the lines descriptive of himself. But she looked up at him with innocent, artless eyes when he had done.

‘I am so stupid, I never could understand poetry; but I caught the words “All ladies love,” and I can understand that, Mr. Boswell, as applied to you.’

Then she looked down, and bit the corner of her kerchief in sudden embarrassment, and looked up again with a glance so shyly sly that his resolu-

tion melted. Not even the terror of Johnson could restrain his gust of sudden passion.

‘My dearest Carry!’ he gurgled, and would have caught her to his breast; but she deftly eluded his awkward embrace.

‘Oh la, Mr. Boswell!’ she cried, with a glance at the pretty French clock that ticked briskly on the chimney-piece, ‘how quickly the time passed! ’Tis almost two of the clock. We must start at once, or we shall be late.’

She bustled about for her bonnet and pillorine, and Boswell’s passion cooled as suddenly as hot iron dropped in cold water. He took up his cocked hat and cane, and followed her demurely out of doors.

To make quite sure, they passed on their way through Temple Gardens, and in the distance saw Goldsmith, with head a little bowed, and right hand caught in his left behind his back, as was his wont, sauntering slowly up and down a long, shady walk, dappled with light and shade. His gay-coloured coat made a bright speck of moving colour through the dark green of the trees, and the birds overhead emulously sang their poetry to the poet.

‘’Twas there,’ Boswell whispered, ‘as they say, that he composed “The Traveller” and “The Deserted Village,” which some foolish critics have set in comparison with Johnson’s “London.”’

The girl did not answer; in fact, she did not hear. Some vague, new, uncomfortable feeling, some faint remembrance of her innocent childhood, was stirring in her at the sight of the peaceful scene and innocent and kindly face.

They had little trouble in gaining admission to Goldsmith's hospitable chambers. 'The doctor is out, Mr. Boswell,' the landlady's daughter said at first, with a suspicious look at the girl.

'We will wait,' Boswell answered shortly, as he had been instructed, and so they passed through without further protest.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SECRET DRAWER

‘Where there’s a will, there’s a way.’

BOSWELL and Caroline made themselves quite at home in poor Goldsmith’s eating, writing, and reception room, and, dislodging some books and manuscripts amid a cloud of dust, found themselves two chairs.

Caroline sat silent for a moment or two. Boswell showed no sign of moving.

‘I will not detain you longer, Mr. Boswell, from your business and friends,’ she said at last; ‘you have been very good to me.’

‘I will wait and help you,’ he answered gallantly; ‘I have some influence with honest Goldsmith.’

‘No, no,’ she entreated earnestly; ‘you must not—indeed you must not. I have no secrets from you, but he may say things at first which I would not wish you, of all men, to hear. I value your good opinion too much. Then afterwards, when he knows the truth, it would shame him doubly to confess his error before his dearest friend. For his sake, for mine, you must go.’

She laid her white hand, soft and warm, entreat-

ingly on his as she spoke, and the touch so thrilled him that caution commanded him to leave her.

He raised the hand to his lips, and kissed it twice, stammered, bowed, stumbled, and went out, closing the door. The instant she was alone the shy, timid, passive maiden changed to the woman, active and alert.

With three quick, light steps, she was at Goldsmith's old-fashioned writing-table of dark, almost black, mahogany. Some heavy books lay in her way ; she lifted them softly to the ground. Then she drew out a deep, shallow drawer, in which there were several bits of string, sealing-wax, a broken box of wafers, a paper of fine sand, unmended blunt quill pens, and pointless lead pencils mingled with crumpled and torn manuscript. All this lumber she set beside the books, and groped behind the drawer for the tiny spring she remembered from Goldsmith's showing. The spring was quickly found and pressed, and the dividing board slid softly down into a receptacle beneath, and a space was opened within. The first touch of her grasping fingers on the big seal and bulky packet told her she had found what she had sought. Another paper lay loose beside the will in the hidden receptacle, and she drew them both together into the light.

The seal was, as she anticipated, intact. The direction, endorsed in a large, legible hand on the cover of the packet—'Not to be opened till Roderick O'Connor's wedding-day'—had kept the seal unbroken. She hastily concealed the packet in her dress, closed the secret receptacle, now empty,

restored the drawer, books, and rubbish to their respective places ; then she found time to glance at the loose sheets of manuscript bound together at the edge with a string, that had lain concealed beside the will in the secret drawer. There were half a dozen sheets in all, legibly though hastily written, blotted here and there, but with no words erased.

Caroline smiled as she read the title, ' In Memory of Dead Hope.' ' Poetry,' she muttered contemptuously, and glanced carelessly down the page.

But her mood changed as she read on. Gradually she grew absorbed in her reading :

' Alive, we taste the bitterness of death,
When one who mingled daily life with us,
Partaker of its sorrows and its joys,
Slips from the clasp of unavailing love
Out to the vague vast world beyond the grave,
Where strong-winged Hope must follow tremblingly .

' But life hath still a keener agony
When love survives though kindly Hope is slain.

' If death hath snatched away a life we love,
Yet sweet remembrance stays to comfort us,
Tells in soft whispers of past joys, and keeps
The after-taste of pleasure in the heart ;
Courageous Hope comes back from spirit-land,
And with bright promises cheers the drooping soul.
But Hope and Memory are silent, both
Helpless to comfort one who mourns for joys
That never have been and can never be.

' I was the fool of fancy, and I lived
In her gay palace halfway up to heaven,
And from the dull routine of daily life
To this retreat my soul escaped at will,
Where hope and happiness were met to welcome me,
And I was jealous of my joy, and made

My conscious heart its hiding-place,
And set light laughter for a guard, that none
Might guess the treasure that my heart contained.
For evermore in that bright dream I felt
The timid pressure of a gentle hand ;
Clear eyes looked kindly on me, in my ears
A low voice softly whispered words of love.
But when the dream was brightest I awoke
To miserable life bereft of Hope.

‘ I have no comfort in my sorrow—none ;
Men that are lured to love and are betrayed
May call up scorn to comfort them, may know
That what they longed for was not what they lost ;
But she was ever kind as beautiful,
And so my love lives on though Hope is dead.

‘ That love had grown so softly in my heart :
Through those bright days I had not felt it grow ;
I had not dreamed its roots had struck so deep,
Or that its branches cast so broad a shade
That every hope and purpose of my heart
Lived in the gracious shelter of its boughs.
But now it lies uprooted and o’erthrown,
Never to wear green leaves for evermore.
And gazing on the ruin I may know
How many birds had built amid its boughs,
How many flowers blossomed around its roots.’

It was a picture that Reynolds would have loved to paint. The sunlight, streaming through the dim windows and dusty air, slanted across the room in a wide golden beam, in which a myriad tiny atoms danced and shone. It just touched the outline of the face and figure of the girl who sat reading, a figure incongruous, yet still curiously in keeping with the quaint confusion of the place.

The poem troubled her strangely, in spite of her-

self. She seemed to see with a dim, uncertain vision, as through a glass darkly, into the very heart of the poet. Thoughts stirred in her that she had never known before, vaguely discomfiting. It was as a person with no ear for music striving with painful effort to find a meaning in the sweet strains which for the initiated are full of an exquisite delight. It was as one born blind, who dreams with uncomprehending soul of the loveliness of the lights and colours that clothe the world. The thoughts of the poet were not her thoughts, nor could they ever be ; but she was a woman, and love in any form appeals to a woman's heart, and she pitied him even while she wondered at his grief, as one pities a child to whom a broken toy is an infinite misfortune. Of the refinement of love she was herself wholly incapable, though the instinct of the she-animal was strong in that beautiful and womanly form. She loved the great, strong, coarse Anthony Jenkins as the sleek young leopard loves her mate ; or, rather, she loved her own delight in him with an animal passion and with an animal fierceness.

The poem she read bred no change in her passion, no slacking in her resolve. There are men and women who never break a moral law because they never know it ; to whom truth and falsehood are things indifferent ; for whom every action is referred to the one test of self-interest or self-pleasure. Such a one was Caroline.

Anthony Jenkins she wanted, and she meant to have him. No scruple as to the means could make her stop or pause.

But still, the reading of the poem awoke in her a strange medley of confused thought. Pity for Goldsmith, hatred of Roderick, bitter jealousy of Nellie, were chief amongst them. She hated Roderick that he so soon consoled himself for her loss with another love. She hated Nellie that she had given him consolation. Goldsmith she thought a fool to cry his heart out for any woman, yet his cry was so piteous she pitied him.

As an afterthought came the desire to keep Roderick and Nellie apart ; then, all at once, she found the course to which all loose conflicting thoughts had vaguely pointed. Quickly and silently she hid the verses beside the packet in the bosom of her dress, and slipped quietly from the room and house, disturbing no one. That evening she folded the stolen poem securely in a wrapper, addressed it in a feigned hand to Miss Helen Vaughan, and put it in the post.

CHAPTER XXIV

RIVALS

‘Two of both kinds make up four.
Here she comes cursed and sad ;
Cupid is a knavish lad
Thus to make poor females mad.’

RODERICK O’CONNOR’S wooing moved slowly. A feeling akin to remorse in Nellie fought hard against her love. But Goldsmith was not content with passive surrender of his own hopes, or with passive approval of Roderick’s suit. He had ceased his visits to Nellie to give the other a fairer chance, till she, with feminine injustice, made the too assiduous Roderick pay for her disappointment. Then the poet praised Roderick to his lady-love only to provoke her disparagement.

On the other hand, Roderick was timid as she was cold. At length Goldsmith hit on a scheme which he believed could not fail to bring them together in spite of themselves.

With simple cunning, he invited Nellie to share with him the diversions of Vauxhall Gardens, and she, who had curtly refused poor O’Connor a score of times, readily consented when Goldsmith asked.

The tickets were bought, and all arrangements made, when, on the very afternoon before the outing—the same afternoon, as it chanced, that Caroline had visited his chambers—Goldsmith found he had an ‘urgent engagement quite impossible to forego,’ and threw himself on Nellie’s pity for release and pardon.

‘I’ve found a substitute, you must know,’ he added, with a smile; ‘Mr. O’Connor hath kindly promised to take my place.’

‘I want no substitute,’ Nellie pouted, ignoring the quick beating of her heart at the name; ‘if I cannot have yourself, I won’t go at all.’

But Goldsmith pleaded and persuaded, and she was not hard to persuade. The tickets were bought, he urged; Mr. O’Connor was quite willing—nay, he seemed anxious—to take her. If she refused, Goldsmith would think she was angry with himself; he would be full of remorse for her disappointment. So, ‘to please him,’ the arrangement was made at last.

Roderick called for her at the theatre. It happened her part in the play that evening closed with the murder of the heroine in the third act. It was early for Vauxhall when they arrived together at the brilliantly-illuminated gates of the great gardens.

Nellie had never been to the place before. Roderick often, though he was now anxious to ignore all former visits. The strangeness of the scene, the long avenues of black trees spangled with myriads of twinkling lamps, the music, the gay crowds on pleasure bent, wrought in Nellie a contagious excitement and exhilaration.

When love reigns, all other thoughts, passions, and emotions are his true subjects, the servants of his power, the ministers of his delight. Nellie's love grew warmer with that pleasurable excitement, and she was strangely gentle and shy with her companion.

As they paced the long walks together or listened to the songs and fiddlers in the great gilt pavilion in the centre of the gardens, she kept her eyes on the ground, lest he should read the love-light in them. She felt her whole being suffused with pleasure that he, the only man in the world for her, was walking by her side.

It was his hour, if he had the wit to know it; but he was shy and frightened. Her reception at the stage-door had been civil, but cool—very cool—and he had not yet recovered from the chill. They found a common topic in Goldsmith, and Roderick praised his friend with an ardour that helped his own suit. 'The kindest-hearted and most generous of men,' said Roderick fervently.

'The sweetest poet, the truest friend,' echoed Nellie in chorus; and as she spoke even then, in the exaltation of her love for another, a faint remorse touched her at the utterance of that word 'friend.'

They dallied over a dainty little supper of chicken and champagne, and spoke little and low, and stole shy glances that dared not meet, half frightened by their own happiness.

As they emerged again into the cool, open air of the gardens, a great shout went up from the crowd. Then a rocket, with a tail like a comet, soared high into the dusky air, and burst into a myriad of

coloured sparks, dimming the patient stars; another and another, till all the air was filled with coloured lights shining on a wide sea of upturned faces and eyes, that glinted in the changing glow.

Silence and darkness fell suddenly, and the white moon and the eternal stars, infinitely remote again, looked placidly down on the scene.

Instinctively they turned away from the noisy crowd down a long, silent path, where the lights were beginning to glimmer and flicker towards extinction. Imagination so wrought in him that the light pressure of the small hand on his arm—to the senses a scarce distinguishable touch—thrilled him through and through to every vein and fibre of his body with feverish delight. Love and its mystery belonged wholly to him. He ignored the countless myriads who, in the long procession of human generations away through the dim twilight of fable, have known that passionate thrill from the touch of the beloved. At that hour he was the first man that had ever loved, and they two, man and maid, were alone in the beautiful world.

‘Nellie,’ he whispered softly at last, ‘you know what is in my heart. What answer can you give me?’

‘What answer do you need?’ she whispered, with a break in her voice.

‘I want yourself, my darling,’ he said, grown bold of a sudden. ‘I want you now at once; I cannot live without you. I thought I could wait; I would fain make myself more worthy of you. I resolved that I would win fortune and distinction for your sake before I spoke again to you of love. But I

cannot wait—I cannot, I cannot. The thought of you is with me night and day. There is a burning impatience in my heart ; I am sick with longing. Come to me, Nellie ; trust yourself to my love ; my whole life will prove my gratitude.’

The eagerness of his passion frightened her a little, but it was a fear full of trembling delight ; yet, womanlike, she shrank from the plunge into the unknown to which he and love urged her.

‘Wait, Roderick,’ she whispered, and her soft voice seemed to caress his name—‘for my sake, wait a little longer before you claim my answer. For his sake, wait ; you know whom I mean. We have treated him hardly ; he has been so good and kind and true and generous to us. I feel weak, wicked, and selfish when I think of him. I have repaid his devotion—a devotion for which any woman might thank Heaven on her knees—by fickle desertion. It would seem cruel and heartless to go so lightly from him to you, flaunting my own inconstancy. Let me have time, Roderick—just a little more time. Afterwards, perhaps——.’

But the man’s fierce love made light of the woman’s timid scruples.

‘You love me, Nellie !’ he cried—‘not him ; that is everything. You are mine by the right of that love. He is worth a hundred of me—I know it ; I own it ; but not for you, your love has chosen me before him. My love for you is more than his. He has himself given you back your pledge. He is too noble and generous to grudge our happiness.’

‘It is his goodness that shames my selfishness. I ought to love him.’

‘Love will not be compelled, Nellie. It is because it is, and gives no reason. Let love plead now for me. Come to me, darling—come to me!’

‘No, no,’ she answered, but there was relenting in her voice, and the last ‘no’ sounded softly as a ‘yes.’

She felt her resolution slipping from her, and walked more quickly to escape the compulsion of his entreaty. A sharp turn of the dark walk took them suddenly into a bright, open space lit with a score of lamps. Passing thus suddenly from the darkness to the light, they almost ran into the arms of another couple coming in the other direction, self-absorbed as themselves.’

Nellie’s ears, quick as a hunted hare’s, just caught, as they met, the whispered words in a man’s impatient voice: ‘D——n it, Carry! I have thanked you till I am hoarse. What more can a man say?’ Then the four started apart, staring at each other bewildered under the lamplight.

Instantly the men knew each other. Anthony Jenkins bowed sulkily, and growled an apology, but Roderick made no sign and spoke no word. His face was white and his eyes blazing.

The ladies had never met before, yet each had heard of the other, and by some quick feminine intuition they knew each other at a glance, and scanned each other’s faces. In her secret heart each confessed and resented the beauty of the other.

Carry’s face wore a mocking smile of triumphant

malice as, remembering her day's work, she glanced from Nellie to Roderick.

Nellie hinted contempt with finer art. Her face was impassive and irresponsive as a marble statue. The actress in her helped the woman. She glanced at Carry and through her with a blank unconsciousness that was maddening. Not so much as a twitching of an eyelid told she saw her there.

Roderick's right hand stole without his knowledge to his sword-hilt. As the fingers touched the guard, he mastered himself by a stupendous effort, and would have gone by without a word or sign.

But Jenkins' bulk barred the way. He stood motionless, confused, staring at Nellie with an almost wolfish stare.

As Roderick moved, Jenkins caught his wits together with a jerk, flourished his cocked hat, and spoke.

'Miss Vaughan,' he began, when Roderick cut him short savagely.

'Miss Vaughan,' he said, 'desires no converse with such as you.'

'Miss Vaughan can speak for herself,' the other retorted as savagely; 'she needs neither help nor restraint from you. Your braggart tricks shall fix no quarrel upon me. I am no brawler in ladies' company.'

'Indeed!' said Roderick with bitter courtesy; 'then you have much changed of late.'

The other scowled and grinned savagely, as an ill-conditioned dog struck by its master, but he let the words pass without comment.

‘Miss Vaughan,’ he persisted doggedly, ‘I have given you cause for offence ; I humbly crave your pardon.’

Nellie, still impassive as a statue, gave one quick glance from Jenkins to the girl at his side. She saw, without seeing, Caroline’s colour fade from her cheek, and come back in a flush of angry red, and her hand grip the man’s arm fiercely.

Answering Jenkins’ appeal with a stiff, stately little bow that might mean anything or nothing, she moved slowly past.

Very slowly they walked. The light pressure on Roderick’s arm held him back, and Nellie’s ears were all the time strained to hear the shrill chiding of the woman they had just passed.

‘I will not be treated so,’ Caroline cried shrilly, ‘for that smooth-faced, red-and-white Miss Inanity.’ Her voice, sharp with anger, was distinct in the listener’s ear. ‘I have done what you asked ; I have risked everything for your sake. I have won for you a huge fortune, and this is my reward.’

‘Nay, Carry,’ Jenkins urged soothingly, ‘be a good wench, and never plague a man with jealous humours. What care I for the Vaughan woman ? I did but crave pardon for past offences.’

‘I saw your face when you spoke to her ; I heard your voice.’

‘All policy, my girl ; we may need her again.’

‘Nay, that excuse will not serve,’ the woman’s shrill voice answered ; ‘you need no one now but me. You are safe, quite safe, now that you have the——’

Here the voices died away in the distance, and, strain her ears as she might, Nellie could hear no more.

What she had heard filled her with uneasiness. These two were plotting some new mischief. Its nature she could not guess, but she sorely feared that Roderick was again to be the victim.

She was very quiet and silent on the way home, and Roderick, yielding to her mood, was, at parting, quiet and silent too. He was rewarded by a gentle pressure of the hand, which sent him home rejoicing through the dark and dangerous streets where night-birds prowled.

CHAPTER XXV

GOLDSMITH SAYS ' NO '

' No waking thought can mend a broken dream,
Nor pity heal a heart that love has hurt.'

NELLIE slept ill that night. Love and danger mingled fantastically in her dreams. When the daylight streamed into her room through uncurtained windows, she awoke with a start to the strong presentiment of evil.

She caught her breath sharply with the same vague fear when some hours later a thick packet, tied and sealed, was put into her hands. She turned it over nervously for a minute or more, eyeing the address in strange, stiff writing before she ventured to cut the strings and break the seals.

The enclosure proved in no way formidable. There was a brief note in the same strange stiff hand as the address.

' MADAM ' (it ran),

' The lines enclosed were written for you, yet not meant for you. I thought it a pity that so much good poetry should be wasted by the modesty of the poet, and so, unknown to the author, I commit

the lines to those eyes whose brightness inspired them, and in so doing prove myself

‘YOUR FRIEND AND HIS.’

Nellie, turning from the letter to the poem, recognised Goldsmith’s handwriting. The title, ‘In Memory of Dead Hope,’ told its own story. Each sad, sweet line made her heart ache with pity and remorse. Tears fell on the pages as she read. She was sorry, not for him alone, but for herself—sorry that she might not realize her share in the alluring dream, and be to him all that he had hoped she might be. She was for the moment almost angry with poor Roderick that he had changed her destiny. ‘He does not love me like this,’ she said, and her lips touched with reverence the paper in which the poet’s hopes and sorrows were embalmed.

Then a restless longing seized her to go to Goldsmith to cheer him, to comfort him, even if her whole life and her happiness were given to the task. Roderick and Roderick’s claims were for the moment forgotten.

The Sabbath bells were ringing cheerily, and the summer air was throbbing with the sound as she passed through the crowded streets that led from the Strand to the poet’s chambers in the Temple. Goldsmith, she was told at his chambers, was walking in the Temple Gardens, and thither she followed without delay. The clanging of the bells had ceased as suddenly as it rose, and only the songs of the birds stirred the still warm air with sound as pleasant to the senses as the perfume of the flowers.

The innocent roses of that garden that had bred the bloodiest war that England has ever known still blossomed white and red in the borders, as they had blossomed when haughty York, and fiery Somerset, and king-making Warwick had plucked them in those shady walks in the dim long ago, and wore them as the gage of battle.

A turn to the right and to the left, and Nellie spied him whom she sought pacing slowly up and down the broad walk by the river, a book in his hand.

So absorbed was he in his reading that, stepping as lightly as the birds over the smooth gravel walk, she was quite close before he saw her.

His face brightened with the pleasure of the meeting. He closed the book and squeezed it into his pocket, that he might have both hands free to welcome her.

'Even Sir Roger de Coverley gives place to you, Nell,' he said.

'Sir Roger de Coverley?' she said, and questioned him with a glance.

'A man, my dear,' he answered quizzically, 'that never lived outside a scribbler's brain, and yet is more real to me than the people whom I shoulder daily in the streets. A great friend of mine, Nell. It is a bond between us that he ever loved those gardens, and often of a morning or an evening, particularly in the quiet of the Sabbath, we pace those walks together. It is good to be in his company. A little whimsical, Nell, but I love him the better for his whimsicalities. He is honest, kindly-hearted, and true, like the kindly-hearted Irishman Steele

that created him. There are few like Sir Roger in the real world, I fear.'

'I know one, at least,' Nellie thought to herself, 'as true and kind.' But she only said: 'I do not wonder at Sir Roger's taste and yours agree in loving the Temple. 'Tis a delicious garden. May I steal you from your friend for awhile, and have his place by your side through those quiet walks?'

His answer was a smile, and side by side they went slowly down the long walk together. The sun was bright, but the air was fresh with a breeze from the river, over whose broad and shining highway a procession of gaily-clad holiday-makers went by, with the white flash of oars rising and falling and a sparkle of scattered spray. Through the opening of the trees they had glimpses of the gay procession that gave light and motion to the quiet scene.

It was Goldsmith's happy nature to take from the passing moment all the enjoyment it could yield, ignoring the past and the future. That quiet walk with Nellie, radiant in her young beauty, by his side was for him an unmixed delight, that brightened the charm of summer sun and pleasant gardens.

His presence was scarcely less pleasant to her. Her soul, like his, keenly relished the charm of their surroundings. But with her pleasure there mingled a bitter aftertaste of discontent.

Hardly more for his sake than for her own she grieved that she could not give him the love he had longed and hoped for. She had spoiled his life, she told herself, when she might have helped it. Where

she would fain have given joy she had given pain. The sad strains of the poem she had just read ran in her mind under the sparkling current of their gay talk ; for, womanlike, she chatted lightly of many things, and made no sign of the purpose that brought her. A man would have gone straight to his end, however rough the road, and said at once what he had come to say.

But the woman led to it slowly by desultory talk, up and down and in and out, like a winding path that climbs a hill and ever verges to the summit, even when it seems to turn aside. She told him of the theatre, and questioned him of his writing. He was busy with his new comedy, he said ; it went forward apace. The chief character, the girl who stooped to conquer, was, as she knew, designed for her. He mocked her with the sprightly sauciness of the character, and delicately hinted praises of her acting.

'And poetry ?' she asked. 'I love your poems best of all ; they are more calmly beautiful than this summer morning. When will you give us another poem ? I know "The Traveller" and "The Deserted Village" by heart. When shall we have another like to those ?'

'Never, my dear,' Goldsmith answered a little sadly ; 'I cannot write poetry for money, and money I must have to live. Besides, Parnasus is overcrowded ; the niches in the great temple of poetry are full. Pope had the last place left. Even Johnson cannot force his way in. There is no room for me ; I have bidden good-bye to the Muses.'

‘And yet I read a poem of yours this morning,’ she said a little nervously. She had found her opening at last.

‘Of mine, Nell!’ he answered, smiling; ‘no? I have published none of late.’

‘This was not published,’ she answered falteringly; ‘it came to me this morning in a sealed packet. I do not know the sender, but the writer I know well.’

As she spoke she put the manuscript gently into his hand.

His face darkened as he saw it, but his trouble was for her alone.

‘Believe me, Nell,’ he said, ‘I never sent you this.’

‘Of course, I knew you would not send it; the sender frankly told me so. This letter came to me with the poem.’

He read it thrice, more puzzled after each reading.

‘I know nothing of this writer or what his motive may have been.’

‘A woman wrote it,’ Nellie answered quickly; ‘of that I am sure; and her motive was to hurt another woman’s heart. But I make no complaint of that; I have deserved the pain and shame I suffer. I have brought this sorrow into your life—I that would die to please you. I am not worthy of you; I know it. I could never be to you all that you have written here, but what I can I will. I am yours if you will have me, your true and loving wife till death shall part us.’

Her voice was full of eagerness, her soft cheek

flushed and her eyes bright with tears, as she put her hand in his.

But Goldsmith shook his head, smiling in quiet, fatherly fashion as he led her to a seat that stood back a little from the walk, overshadowed by a bushy chestnut-tree in full bloom and perfume.

'No, my dear,' he said, and soothingly stroked the soft hand he still held. 'It was good of you to offer, Nell; it was like you to offer, but it cannot be. Even if there were no Roderick it could not be. I have wakened from my dream, Nell, and it has at the wakening vanished never to return. It will always be a triumph to the ugly old bachelor to remember that the most beautiful woman in London begged him to marry her, and he refused.'

Her lips trembled with a faint smile.

'There is no woman on earth worthy of you,' she said.

'Then you have answered yourself, my dear, in your own unworthiness. How do the lines go? You have played Portia, and should remember:

"Let none presume
To claim an undeservèd dignity."

If that is not the line 'tis like it.'

'I am glad you can laugh at me,' she cried, relieved, yet vaguely disappointed. 'I thought you were broken-hearted; I wept when I read your poem.'

'I wept, too, when I wrote it--wept ink over my sorrows. Verses are to a poet, even the humblest poet, what tears are to a woman. I am not laughing,

Nell, at you or at myself. It eased the strain in my heart to write ; the poem was to me a kindly narcotic dulling pain. I was in earnest—I was in deadly earnest when I wrote it ; but I felt much better when it was written, and I had poured my trouble into the sympathetic ear of the Muse. I had to smooth and round the sharp edges of my feelings, to shape them into words and verse, as the sea rounds the fragments that have been torn from the cliff. Poetry, my dear, anticipates time in softening grief. The sharp sorrow I felt at first has passed into a gentle remembrance of sorrow that I would not part with if I could. This little poem, Nell, was my substitute for you. I decked it out in love for you. But I meant to have kept it for myself alone.'

'How passed it from your possession ?' she said. 'Who sent it ?'

'Nay, that I cannot tell,' he answered. ''Tis as much a mystery to me as to yourself.'

There was curiosity in his voice, but of anxiety not the slightest trace. 'I could have sworn I had laid it in the secret drawer of my writing-table.'

'Then 'twas stolen,' she cried ; 'some woman stole it. Was there nothing with it in the drawer ?'

At last she had succeeded in awakening his anxiety. She saw a sudden fear spring into his eyes.

'There was a paper there, Nell, I would not have lost for the world—a trust from a dead friend.' In a few words he told her of the will.

A thousand vague suspicions settled into grim certainty as she listened.

'Dear friend,' she faltered, 'it breaks my heart to grieve you. I may be wrong—I hope I'm wrong—but I fear the will, too, is stolen.'

'We will try,' he cried with sudden energy, that was more despair than hope. 'Come with me, Nell; we will try at once.'

They passed quickly out of the warm glow of the gardens into the cool gloom of his chambers. He pushed aside the books and manuscript, letting them tumble to the floor, drew out the shallow drawer so hastily that it fell, scattering its contents, touched the spring, and groped with eager fingers in the recess behind it. He was loth to accept the truth, but at last, with a despairing cry—'It is gone! it is stolen!'—he drew his hand out empty.

CHAPTER XXVI

NELLIE PLAYS THE COQUETTE

‘To say why gals act so or so,
Or don’t, ’ould be presumin’;
Mebby to mean *yes* and say *no*
Comes nater’l to woman.’

NELLIE VAUGHAN was puzzled. Yet certain glimmerings of light shone through her perplexity to make it more bewildering. In answer to her eager questioning, Goldsmith had told her everything he knew of the giving of the will, and the direction on the face of it. He remembered, as a thing irrelevant to him but not to her, that Boswell had called the day before at his chambers with a lady, and had gone away almost at once, leaving the lady behind. No one had seen the lady go, but she was not there on his return, and honest Goldsmith, least suspicious of mankind, had dismissed the incident from his mind, to be recalled by Nellie’s persistent questioning.

He was full of sorrow and vague remorse, blaming himself for lack of care, for breach of faith to his dead friend, for the wrong done to his godson, who, he had little doubt, would benefit by the will. Of

the person of the thief, or the motives of the theft, he had no suspicion. He was not a man to suspect without cause, and cause there seemed to him to be none.

Nellie had comforted him as best she could, now making light of the loss, now hinting at recovery, and, above all, strongly insisting that Goldsmith was not to blame, and persisting against all reason that it was impossible Roderick could benefit by the will.

Comforting is hard work when it is done against the grain of one's own convictions. One cannot give heat without losing it. When Nellie got home that evening, having lured poor Goldsmith halfway back to cheerfulness, she was herself sorely troubled and despondent.

She had a feverish anxiety on her to recover the stolen will. All night she dreamt of it. In her sleep she spied the corner of the stolen paper peeping from all sorts of most unlikely places, and drew it forth in triumph, and presently wakened with empty hands bitterly disappointed, and still half persuaded the dream was real.

She was busy next morning rehearsing, and put the thoughts of the will resolutely from her for a while. Of late she had got a special room of her own—a large room in the return of the house, almost bare of furniture, save two or three high-backed spindle-legged armchairs, a small table, and a huge full-length mirror turned sideways from the lights. Here she was accustomed to try on her new dresses and new characters for the theatre.

This morning it was her favourite character of

Rosalind, which was to be reproduced the next week, and in which she was specially anxious to excel. Dressed in doublet of Lincoln-green, and hose of same colour slashed with scarlet, and close-fitting silk tights, she played her part to the approval of her own shapely figure in the glass—a perfect Rosalind, the most charming of all Shakespeare's womenkind.

But, after a while, her attention began to wander from the words. She found herself repeating them by rote, unconscious of their meaning. So she dropped into one of the square-armed, deep-cushioned chairs that were much more cosy than they looked, and let her thoughts free.

Her hands found an old playbill on the table, and began tearing it to small square pieces, neatly, carefully, deliberately, till table and floor were littered with the fluttering green fragments. But all the time her mind did not know what her fingers were at. As eagerly as a pack of hounds in a thick cover her thoughts beat about the mystery of the stolen will, now in this direction, now in that. Various incidents pieced themselves into the story, misfitted, slipped out, and had to be reshuffled and replaced.

That Roderick would benefit by the stolen will seemed almost certain. If Roderick gained, then must Anthony Jenkins lose. Here was the motive for Jenkins' malignant pursuit of Roderick. Not the sole motive, she acknowledged to herself, remembering the man's looks and words.

Yet it was not he. The thief was surely the

woman he had called Carry, the woman who had come with Boswell to Goldsmith's chambers, the woman who had sent her the verses that lay in the same secret drawer. She had stolen it, and given it to Jenkins, her lover.

The truth came to Nellie's mind in a flash, and a moment later came the remembrance of the words overheard in Vauxhall Gardens to turn suspicion into certainty.

Had they destroyed the will or kept it? Could she by any means recover it? All her mind kept beating on those two perplexing questions. A sudden sharp knock at the door made her start from her chair, scattering the torn paper like a light-green snowstorm about the room.

'Mr. O'Connor,' the servant said, 'wished to see her. He was in the drawing-room with her mother.'

'Did you say I was specially engaged, Jennie; that I could see no one?'

'He said he thought you would see *him*, miss.'

Poor Roderick's overconfident message, and the girl's smirking face as she gave it, jarred on Nellie's mood.

'Very well,' she answered sharply; 'tell him I will see him;' and as she spoke she hastily hid the doublet, hose, and tights in a flowered silk dressing-gown that reached from her neck to her feet.

Poor Roderick came in an unlucky moment to woo. Nellie was vexed with herself, and it is a woman's way when she is vexed with herself to let others feel it. She felt she had treated him

badly by her visit and offer to Goldsmith. A plan for the will's recovery was vaguely shaping itself in her mind which she knew he would have reason to resent. But she was in no mood for either penitence or for atonement. The fact that she was in the wrong made her all the more disposed to be irritable with him.

He, unlucky man, had come to her with elation of their last meeting still warm in his heart, to urge again his plea for a speedy marriage. He had even, in his reckless eagerness, fortified himself with a special license.

His face was bright with love and hope as he showed himself at the door. It clouded at the coldness of his reception.

‘Why, Nellie,’ he faltered, ‘I thought that——’

‘You thought that I must see you, however busy I might be and indisposed for company, and you told your thoughts to the servant. Well, I have seen you. What’s your urgent business with me?’

He kept his temper, and his gentleness half disarmed her anger.

‘At our last meeting,’ he said, ‘only two days ago, you were kinder to me. You allowed me, at least, to hope. Has anything happened since to change your mind?’

‘Many things have happened since then,’ she answered hastily, and without a pause. She told him of her visit to Goldsmith, though not its object, and the discovery of the theft of the papers. She exaggerated Goldsmith’s despair at the loss; she even hinted her suspicion of the thieves.

He waited patiently, though surprised, at her story till she was quite done.

‘But what has all this got to do with me?’ he asked. ‘I am sorry, of course, at the doctor’s loss and trouble. Still, by your telling, he was in no way to blame, and I do not see how anything that has happened should come betwixt you and me, Nell.’

‘Cannot you see,’ she cried impatiently, ‘what the doctor and I saw at once, that this will was in your favour, and that this man Jenkins, or that creature of his, the woman you were so fond of, stole it to keep you out of the property?’

‘I do not think so,’ he answered slowly. ‘My uncle was ever fonder of Carry than of me.’

‘Why should they steal it if it were in her favour?’ Nellie asked.

‘They might not know; they might wish to make sure. But, anyway, the money is gone, and there’s an end of it. We can make a home, Nell, without it, if you will be content with a humble one for a time. My income has grown, and will grow. Already the briefs are coming in. It was of that I came to speak to you; I came to ask you if——’ He paused irresolutely.

‘What?’ she asked with a calmness that boded no good to his suit.

‘Well, marry me at once,’ he cried impetuously, ‘as you half promised in the gardens to marry me. I have got the special license. We can be married to-morrow, if you chose.’

‘If I chose!’ she answered with rising anger. ‘Oh! it was good of you to think of that trifling

proviso—so good of you to give me any choice in the matter. I most humbly thank you that, after you had got the license, you should think at all of a thing so unimportant as my consent. But, as you have done me the honour to ask me, my answer is no, no, no! I will marry no one till the stolen will is found again.'

'That will be never,' he said.

'I don't care; then or never.'

'But why, Nellie?' he pleaded. 'What is the will to us?'

'I believe it makes you the heir of all the property,' she answered unthinkingly.

He was angry at last.

'I did not think you were mercenary,' he said.

Her anger caught flame from his as fire from fire. The secret feeling that she was wrong made her the more angry.

'If you came to insult me,' she retorted, 'you have succeeded, and, having succeeded, you may go. Go to your first mercenary love that stole the will. She doubtless will share the spoil with you. It was your money I ever loved and not yourself. You have said it, and I will not answer insult with insult by giving you the lie. Go to her, I say—go!'

She stood erect like a tragedy queen, with flashing eyes and motioning hand, and passionate anger in her voice.

Roderick's manly spirit resented the injustice.

'You wrong me,' he said, 'and you know you

wrong me. You will be sorry when you come to your calmer and better self.'

Vaguely, through eyes that tears dimmed, she saw him bow and pass out, and the door close behind him. Then the heroic attitude relaxed suddenly, and she collapsed in the easy-chair, shaken with sobs.

Her thoughts were in a whirl. She knew she was unjust, yet still her anger against him mingled with her remorse. Why had he snapped at her words? Why had he called her mercenary? If he had coaxed her she would have yielded. Why had he not coaxed her? Through all there ran the obstinate resolve that the will must be recovered. She would refuse him again, she determined, when she had made him a millionaire by its recovery.

Thereupon she dried her eyes, and fell once more to plotting how the will might be recovered. A good or evil chance sent the answer to her thoughts.

'A gentleman to see you, miss,' said the maid at the door again. But before Nellie could answer, the gentleman, who had crept quietly up the stairs behind the maid, put her gently aside, and stepped boldly into the room.

Nellie thought at first Roderick had come back for pardon, and, turning round, with a blush and a smile and a welcoming word, she saw the burly figure of Anthony Jenkins bowing profoundly with his hand on his heart. He was richly, even gorgeously dressed, and the magnificent costume of

sombre purple silk gave a certain dignity to the burly figure and large-featured face.

Nellie thrilled through with repugnance and fear. But there was no sign of her feeling on her face. The folds of her silk dressing-gown had fallen apart, and for a moment before she drew the tasselled cords together Jenkins feasted his bold eyes on the comely form and shapely limbs of Rosalind ; the next he dropped his eyes respectfully, and spoke.

‘Forgive this intrusion, Miss Vaughan,’ he said, ‘though it may be another trespass added to the list of my offences against you. I have come to offer you my penitence, and to entreat your pardon more amply and more earnestly than was in my power when last we met.’

He had schooled himself in this speech, and now he delivered it with a kind of blunt earnestness, which one who did not know the man might easily mistake for honesty.

But Nellie made no such mistake, though still her face showed no sign of the repugnance he inspired.

She bowed slightly—a grave, non-committal bow, —which Jenkins accepted, as she meant him to accept it, for encouragement.

‘To excuse myself further,’ he said, ‘were perhaps to exaggerate my offence.’

‘I am willing to accept your professions as sincere,’ Nellie answered, with a second bow, that gently but firmly suggested his dismissal.

So unmistakable was the gesture of this accom-

plished actress that Jenkins answered it as a spoken word.

‘Allow me,’ he pleaded, ‘to trespass on your patience one moment more with an offer of atonement. I will not plead the temptation, that might perhaps palliate my offence. I only ask you to test the sincerity of my repentance.’

‘By what test?’ she asked.

‘By any you can devise; the harder the better. There is nothing I will not do or give at your request.’

The chance so fitted with the thoughts that troubled her before he came that she was powerless to resist the temptation.

‘Have a care,’ she said; ‘I may put you to the test.’

‘You can confer no greater happiness.’

‘Not now; some other time, perhaps——’

‘When may I come again for my task?’

‘The day after to-morrow at this hour.’

‘Meanwhile, I may live in hope?’

‘All men, I hope, live so.’

She smiled as she said it, remembering the quotation, and her smile emboldened him.

Before she was aware he caught her hand and kissed it twice, and then, with a sweeping bow, almost brushing the floor with his three-cornered hat, he backed out of the door.

‘She is to be won,’ he muttered to himself, as he went heavily down the stairs; ‘’twas well thought on to face it out boldly. Anthony Jenkins, you have not yet lost your way with the women. All

the jades love a master better than a servant. Yon piece of pride is more than half my own. The rest is easy.'

But Nellie, angry and ashamed, sat rubbing her hand hard with her handkerchief where his lips had touched till she had rubbed a vivid red patch on the white skin.

CHAPTER XXVII

A DINNER AT THE LITERARY CLUB

‘The pangs of despised love the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes.’

RODERICK, with youth’s thoughtless selfishness, carried his troubles straight to Goldsmith. Into that kindly bosom he poured his sorrows, unconscious of the pain he gave. He raved of his love for Nellie, not remembering that the man to whom he raved loved her better than he could, and had sacrificed the great hope of his life for her happiness.

Poor Roderick was wildly inconsistent in his despair. He told his story half a dozen divers ways, now cursing her fickleness, now his own folly.

Goldsmith listened with infinite patience, and comforted him as best he could.

‘Girls have their moods and whims,’ he said, ‘even the best of them. The fault was largely my carelessness. She was troubled by the theft of the will. She believed, as I believe, it meant loss of fortune to you.’

‘And if it did, I care not,’ cried Roderick recklessly.

‘But she cared.’

‘For my fortune. She loved me for my fortune’s sake, and discarded me when it was lost. I cannot believe it; I won’t believe it.’ Yet he spoke with the warmth of belief.

His words kindled the first spark of anger in Goldsmith’s placid temper.

‘Who asked you to believe it?’ he answered hotly. ‘Why put so vile a calumny in words? You wrong her beyond forgiveness by the mere thought of it. Nay, I do not wonder she dismissed you in anger if you hinted such things to her.’

Instantly poor Roderick was abashed to sudden humility, convicted of blasphemy against the divinity of his mistress. He was unworthy of her, he humbly confessed—he was unworthy of her. He had repaid her goodness with insult. He would go to her at once and implore her pardon.

Goldsmith, knowing as little as he did, applauded his resolution, not guessing that already Nellie herself was more than half repentant.

So they parted, and Goldsmith suddenly discovered he was nearly half an hour late for dinner at the Literary Club with Dr. Johnson and his friends.

He found the party halfway through dinner on his arrival, and was saluted by a chorus of serio-comic reproaches, and threats of a new series of epitaphs on ‘the late Dr. Goldsmith.’ But Burke, with a sly allusion to the latest retaliation, silenced his tormentors.

Goldsmith had kept the secret of the lost will from his friends, but it was not in his frank and

candid nature to wholly hide his trouble. Boswell, lately admitted to the Literary Club at the earnest solicitation of Johnson, who went bail for the good behaviour of his parasite, was quick to notice Goldsmith's trouble as a buzzing fly to light on a raw wound.

With that lack of tact which simulated the malice of a man of more intelligence, he proceeded to quiz the doctor clumsily on his woebegone appearance.

'Our poor Goldy has got the slipper,' he said; 'his face tells his story. He wears his heart upon his sleeve for daws to pick at.'

'Or cock-sparrows,' said Garrick.

'Nay, 'tis "daws" in the play,' Boswell replied in perfect good faith.

'But in real life it's perky, conceited cock-sparrows,' Beauclerk interposed.

'Very likely,' Boswell assented unsuspectingly. 'I was quoting from the play. Now I propose that Goldy gives us of the club the full particulars of this affair. It is possible we may be able amongst us to offer him helpful counsel, but in any case we will have secured a topic of instructive and improving conversation on which our venerable friend will be heard to the best advantage.'

There was a shout of laughter at this delicate suggestion, and good-natured Goldsmith's laugh was the loudest of the chorus.

'Come, Goldy,' cried Garrick, 'get ready for the carver.'

'Boswell will wield the sauce-ladle,' said Beauclerk.

‘And Beauclerk will supply the pepper and salt,’ said Garrick.

But Boswell was not in the least disconcerted by their laughter. To one man alone he was servile, to all others impudent. There were only two opinions in the world he valued—his own and Dr. Johnson’s.

‘Sir,’ he inquired, turning to his ponderous oracle, ‘what is your opinion of my suggestion?’

‘Why, sir,’ thundered Johnson in reply, ‘you are impertinent. Your suggestion was an insolence to Dr. Goldsmith and to me. You will never learn to conform to the usages of good breeding, or to appreciate the rules by which social intercourse, even in its most familiar forms, must be regulated, lest it degenerate from familiarity to rudeness.’

The self-sufficient smirk faded from poor Boswell’s face. He stared with wide eyes and mouth at the surly sage, unable to frame a word in reply, while Johnson contentedly returned to the discussion of a huge plate of stuffed veal.

Goldsmith good-naturedly interposed in Boswell’s favour.

‘Offence, doctor,’ he said, ‘amongst friends lies only in the intention, and I warrant Mr. Boswell intended no offence to me, much less to you, whom he reveres.’

Boswell welcomed relief eagerly from any quarter, even from the despised Goldsmith. ‘In proof that no offence was meant,’ he ejaculated, ‘I am willing to do myself what I suggested Dr. Goldsmith should do for the edification of the company.’

The suggestion was received with a shout of approving laughter.

‘Our Bozzy’s love affairs are certain to be edifying,’ cried Beauclerk. ‘Let us have them at once.’

‘I mean to mention but a single case,’ Boswell explained.

‘His conquests are beyond count,’ Garrick said. ‘All ladies love a lapdog,’ he added, under his breath.

Johnson looked up from his plate, his mouth full of the roast veal, and glared for a moment in inarticulate rage at the unfortunate Bozzy.

‘Sir,’ he spluttered, as soon as he could get the words out, ‘it can neither be to your pleasure nor your profit to expose your secret foibles for the amusement of your friends.’

‘Sir,’ Boswell retorted, with an echo of Johnson’s own pomposity softened by servility, ‘no wise man should allow his judgment to be swayed nor his purpose altered by the fear of inconsiderate laughter. Besides, I have practical purpose in the disclosure. I desire your advice in an emergency that closely touches my character and conduct.’

‘Such advice is best bestowed in private,’ muttered Johnson, modified a little by the extreme deference of this appeal.

‘Why, sir, it were churlish selfishness in me to so require it. The same advice which will regulate my conduct will equally profit my friends, should they ever find themselves in a similar emergency.’

‘He regards Dr. Johnson,’ Goldsmith said aside to Burke, ‘as a bottle of fine old crusted port, which

it is his special function to uncork, pour out, and hand round.'

'My case is rather the corollary of Goldy's,' continued Boswell, speaking quickly, lest Johnson should command silence, 'though both are connected with the fair sex. A difficulty certainly arises when one allows himself to become the victim of an unrequited passion. But there is a difficulty more dignified, perhaps, but also more delicate, when one becomes involuntarily the object of such a passion in a female.'

'Which is your case, Bozzy,' queried Garrick anxiously. 'How sad!'

'It would be affectation to deny that you have conjectured the fact correctly, sir,' said Boswell; 'but the sequel will not, I trust, be of necessity sad. Sir'—here he turned to direct his words specially to Dr. Johnson, who sat satiated with food and wine, enjoying the grotesque humour of the situation—'sir, let us suppose a young woman of small fortune, but of great personal attractions, gives unmistakable proofs of her preference for a man.'

'How, Bozzy, how?' queried Beauclerk.

'By manifest appreciation of my person and conversation,' gravely answered Boswell, to whose candour copious bumpers of port had contributed, 'by soft words and languishing glances, whose meaning it were impossible to mistake.'

'Have you bussed the wench, Bozzy?' demanded Garrick.

'I did more than once purpose to salute her,' he gravely confessed, 'but she contrived to evade me,

yet in such a fashion as to show she was influenced rather by modesty than by repugnance.'

'Well, sir,' demanded Dr. Johnson sternly, yet with a lurking twinkle in his eye, 'on what particular of this momentous business do you desire my counsel?'

'Should I marry the girl, sir?' Boswell queried abruptly.

'Have you given her grounds for matrimonial expectations?'

'I believe she anxiously expects my offer, and will eagerly accept it. She has hinted as much to me by word and look.'

'To indirectly suggest expectation constitutes a moral obligation as binding as a direct and unequivocal pledge. Under either circumstances a specific performance is required.'

'Egad, I will marry the wench to-morrow,' cried the elated Boswell. 'I gie ye a toast, gentlemen,' he cried, relapsing into Scotch in his liquor—"The bonniest lassie in broad England." It's a peety she's na Scotch. I drink to Car——'

'No names, sir,' cried Goldsmith, so sharply that Boswell, turning to stare at him in tipsy surprise, forgot to finish his sentence.

'We'll drink it wi' a' the honours,' he cried, and, grasping Johnson's great hand, fervently he strove to lift one foot on the table, but he slipped, and fell backwards with such a jerk that he drew the smothering bulk of the sage over him on the floor.

Johnson struggled, puffing, to his feet, and gazed

compassionately on the prostrate form of his faithful follower, who had fallen into a sudden sleep.

‘Oh that men should put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains!’ quoted Garrick dramatically, apostrophizing the prostrate body.

‘In this case the theft is no more than petty larceny,’ said Goldsmith, smiling, as he essayed to lift the snoring Boswell to a couch.

‘De minimus not curat lex,’ said Dr. Johnson.

‘Poor Goldy, you’re verra drunk, ma mon!’ muttered Boswell, opening his eyes as suddenly as he had closed them. ‘Gie me another glass of port.’

He lurched towards the table, but Johnson’s burly form interposed, and Boswell cowered before him.

‘Sir,’ the sage roared sternly, with a voice like the deep growl of a great mastiff, ‘you are intoxicated, shamefully intoxicated. You have broken the guarantee I have given the club for your good behaviour.’ Then as Boswell finally relapsed into unconsciousness, he added : ‘’Tis wasting criticism on unresisting imbecility to attempt to reason with him in his present comatose condition. Morpheus must heal the injuries that Bacchus has inflicted. Dr. Goldsmith, will you be kind enough to summon a hackney coach?’

Dr. Johnson lifted the limp and helpless Boswell in his arms, and carried him downstairs to the coach as easily as a nurse carries an infant. The party broke up when the two drove away together.

In a very depressed frame of mind poor Goldsmith

walked home alone through the deserted streets to his lonely chambers. It was dismal enough, with empty grate and littered tables, but he had never found it so lonely before. That gentle and genial spirit was not given to repining. But disappointment had followed so quickly on disappointment that his cheerfulness was stunned for the moment. Small things will hurt an open wound; even the petty buzzing of Boswell had jarred his nerves and fretted his temper. Life had never before seemed to him a thing so meaningless and so dismal—a long, dull, straight road, with care for a companion, and with death waiting at the end.

A bottle of Madeira stood on the table at his elbow; mechanically he filled himself a full glass. He was but half conscious of a low whisper in his heart, the first appeal of the devil that tempts men to drunkenness. ‘This is the way,’ the whispering devil said, ‘to make life a pleasant dream, to forget sorrow and care and death.’

He had half finished the glass when he had a sudden vision of Boswell lying drunk on the floor—a shameful parody of a human being. Truly the old Spartans were wise in their generation when they made bugbears of their drunken helots. Goldsmith flung glass and wine together into the empty grate, trimmed his lamp, mended a pen, and sat down resolutely to write.

It was like acute physical pain forcing his mind to the task. Thoughts and words came slowly and reluctantly at first from his racked brain to the paper, as a wheeled vehicle starting on a rough uphill road.

Slowly it moves at first, and with much labour ; the smallest pebble is a paralyzing obstacle in its track. But every moment it gathers speed. Presently the ridge of the ascent is overpassed, now it glides easily, smoothly, swiftly of its own accord, and the horse has no more to do than run before.

So, after a little while, inspiration returned to Goldsmith. He passed from the drab-coloured dulness of real life into the gay scenes his imagination created. He lived among the people of his own fancy, and forgot his own troubles in their joy.

So he wrote on till his lamp began to grow dim in the first faint flush of the dawn, and he laid aside pen and paper at last with the pleased consciousness of good work done.

On that lonely night, in the dismal, disordered chambers, was written the brightest scene of the immortal comedy 'She Stoops to Conquer,' a legacy to the gaiety of nations, helping to make the world a pleasanter place to live in, helping to soothe many a troubled heart with the cheerful and wholesome anodyne of innocent laughter.

CHAPTER XXVIII

BOSWELL'S WOOING

'A frog he would a-wooing go—
Heigh-ho ! said Rowley ;
Whether his mother would let him or no—
Heigh ho ! said Anthony Rowley.'

BOSWELL rose next morning cheerfully and with good appetite for his breakfast. Drunkenness bred in him no remorse of mind or body. 'Twas a case of the 'small pot soon hot,' and his weak brain surrendered at discretion to liquor, and so escaped lasting injury. It was curiously characteristic of the man that he set himself to write verses about his own drunkenness. Some sheets of paper lay on his breakfast-table, on which he scribbled disjointed lines, while he ate with an appetite untainted by the last night's excess :

'In Johnson's company suppose
You had the happiness to dine ;
Would you complain if you arose
Elated by the generous wine ?
'So I before I went to bed
On sacred manners did encroach,
Which made me feel what I most dread,
Johnson's just frown and self-reproach.'

He smacked his lips over the last line, and read it over twice complacently. Then the thought came to him he would turn his verse into a love poem, and, after sucking the handle of his pen meditatively, he started again :

‘ But ’twas not wine alone abashed :
Remembrance of your bright eyes’ rays
At once intoxication flashed,
And all my frame was in a blaze.

‘ But not a brilliant blaze I own :
Of the dull smoke I’m now ashamed ;
It was a dreary ruin grown,
And not enlightened though inflamed.

‘ Victim at once to wine and love,
I hope, dear Carry, you’ll forgive
The error which you can’t approve,
So henceforth I may wiser live.’

He chuckled again complacently when he had finished the last verse.

‘ Poor Goldy would give something to be able to write like that,’ he thought.

The sole memory that he carried intact out of the confusion of the previous evening was that Johnson had directed him to marry Caroline. As the advice of the sage backed up his own inclination, he prepared to set about it at once.

He dressed himself with special care in a broad-skirted coat of claret-coloured velvet and with waistcoat of sprigged silk, over which rosebuds twined. Turning out about noon, he paced slowly along the sunny side of Fleet Street, in pleasing contemplation of the honour and pleasure he was

about to bestow on Caroline by the long-expected, long-deferred offer of his heart and hand.

It chanced that he was not the only jocund suitor abroad that sunny noon in Fleet Street. Behind him came Anthony Jenkins, rustling in tawny silk, and crowned with white-powdered wig, with a three-cornered hat perched jauntily atop of it.

The big man, commonly so surly, was now in boisterous good-humour.

‘Whither away, friend Boswell?’ he cried, and clapped a heavy hand on Boswell’s shoulder. ‘Whither away that you have no time to salute a friend?’

Boswell had a respect for all people who were talked about, for good or evil. He looked up to Jenkins as a dare-devil, a roistering blade, a noted Mohock from whom no woman’s honour and no man’s life was safe. His respect was increased since the other had come into the huge fortune that made him more talked about and envied than before.

So he returned Jenkins’ greeting cordially, and answered the careless and indeed purposeless salutation by hinting, like a man only anxious to be questioned, that he was about very special and private business that morning. Jenkins took the hint, and questioned him. Poor Boswell could no more keep a secret than a sieve could hold water. All the world was his confidant in his most private affairs. In five minutes he had told Jenkins of his errand, of Johnson’s advice, and the name of the lady he was about to honour with the offer of his hand.

Jenkins, eager to be off with the old love before he

was on with the new, wished Boswell good luck heartily, and tried hard to believe his confidence was well founded.

Then the thought ran through his mind, here was a good chance to break the news of his own desertion to Carry. He could deny the truth, if need be, and call Boswell a meddlesome liar.

‘Secrets bring secrets,’ he said with exaggerated friendliness. ‘I am on the same errand myself. You may have heard of the lady whom I woo—the finest actress and the handsomest woman in town, egad!’

‘Not Nellie Vaughan?’ cried Boswell.

‘Yes, Miss Nellie Vaughan,’ retorted Jenkins with simulated anger; ‘and you will find it wiser, let me tell you, Mr. Boswell, to speak in future with more respect of the promised wife of Anthony Jenkins, at your service.’

Boswell instantly babbled apologies. He had the greatest possible respect for the lady. He heartily congratulated his friend on his good fortune. But Jenkins seemingly but half appeased, bade him a surly good-bye at the corner of the street.

Boswell walked on a few paces alone, paused, turned, and, coming back stealthily again to the corner where they had parted, was just in time to see Jenkins pass through Nellie’s door and disappear.

‘’Tis true, then,’ he muttered, as he proceeded once more on his own love errand.

Carry gave him the usual affectionate welcome, tinged with simple and childlike reverence. Indeed, her manner to him was a subtle feminine parody of

his own to Dr. Johnson, and he treated her innocent devotion with something of Dr. Johnson's pompous patronage.

He settled himself with conscious dignity in a great, deep-armed easy-chair, while Carry bustled about to put aside his three-cornered hat and silver-headed cane, and to carry wine and sweetmeats on a tray to the table at his elbow.

As he sipped the wine slowly, he glanced now and again at her seductive face and figure, and glowed with pleasurable anticipation of her delight and gratitude which he was about to evoke. He dallied with the pleasure as children dally with a sweetmeat, keeping the sweetest morsel to the last. For nearly an hour Boswell talked on various topics, but chiefly of Dr. Johnson and himself.

'Johnson is a man of great perspicuity,' he said at last; 'even I am much beholden to his counsel.'

He smiled as he said it, for the thought came to him what special reason Carry herself had, if she but knew it, to be grateful to Dr. Johnson, whose advice threw such good fortune on her as Boswell for a husband. Then, with his customary delicacy and tact, he turned the talk to the glories of his ancestral home of Auchinleck, and the feudal dignities of the noble family of Boswell. Carry listened with manifest delight and surprise.

'My father is very old,' said the insinuating Boswell.

'How sad!' said the sympathetic Carry.

'Nay, we must all die,' said the philosopher, 'passing through nature to mortality. I am not

wishful for his death, but on his demise I will be myself the Laird of Auchinleck.'

'How delightful!' chorused Carry.

'The Laird of Auchinleck can walk ten miles in a straight line on his own domain,' said Boswell.

'How wonderful!' She had long since guessed what was coming. But at their last meeting Jenkins had quizzed her on the caution of her canny Scotch lover, whose prudence was bear-leader to his love, and who had always steered clear of a declaration. So now that she might have an answer ready for Jenkins when they next met, she let poor Boswell rush upon his fate. She meant to put his suit aside with soft words about her own unworthiness, which would at once flatter and encourage him. Thus it chanced her interest in the ten miles of barren heath and mountain at Auchinleck was extreme.

'The Lairds of Auchinleck have always married great heiresses,' Boswell said slowly, and noticed with approval the humble, pensive disappointment that showed itself on her face at his words.

He sipped his wine more slowly, enjoying the thought of the sudden change on that fair face from despair to rapture when she should learn the glorious fate in store for her.

But she grew impatient to bring him to the point, and past it.

'The future lady of Auchinleck will be a proud and happy woman,' she murmured softly, with a mournful cadence in her voice.

'She will be a very good and beautiful woman, Carry,' he answered, and gazed upon her so mean-

ingly that she simpered shyly, and her eyelids drooped with maiden modesty.

‘Caroline,’ Boswell continued with solemn dignity, ‘the Laird of Auchinleck might fairly look for rank and riches in his wife. I ask for neither. I have known you now for some years, and I have been attracted by your modesty even more than by your personal attractions, which I confess are considerable. You have always shown a commendable retirement in your life, and on the whole a wise discretion as to the selection of your company. There is, indeed, a wild and dissolute cousin of yours named Anthony Jenkins, who is hardly a fit acquaintance for the wife of the Laird of Auchinleck ; but still——’

‘He is nothing to me,’ murmured Carry softly.

‘Of that I am assured,’ quoth Boswell. ‘If I had any lingering doubts on this point—and I had none—they would have been dispelled this morning, when he told me he had engaged himself to marry the actress, Miss Helen Vaughan.’

‘What !’

The question was snapped at him so suddenly and so angrily that it made him jump in his chair and spill the port wine over his brodered waistcoat.

He looked at Carry with amazement. His modest, shy, and bashful maiden was suddenly changed to an angry spitfire—the cheek flushed, the white teeth showing through the red lips, the dark eyes blazing with wrath.

‘What was that you said ?’ she insisted angrily.

‘Miss Caroline,’ he said with dignity, ‘I am not

accustomed to be cross-examined. I am not pleased to see you so excited. For the future you will learn to control such ebullitions of temper. On this occasion I am willing to overlook it, and will not further refer to the subject, nor shall it deter me from the intention with which I have come here to-day, fortified by the full consent and warm approval of my illustrious friend, Dr. Johnson. Caroline, as prospective Laird of Auchinleck, I have the honour to offer you my hand and fortune.'

'Oh, don't talk nonsense! Why can't you answer my question, and be done with it? What about Anthony Jenkins and the actress woman?'

She was boiling over with angry impatience.

'Caroline,' he began again, utterly bewildered at her tone, 'I fear you could not have rightly understood me. As Laird of Auchinleck, I ask you to be my wife.'

'Laird of a Scotch bog and a crop of thistles! When I marry, I marry a man, not a wire-haired Scotch terrier, to live in a thatched castle and eat oat-cake. What lie was it you told just now of Anthony Jenkins?'

A bombshell would have amazed him less than her anger and contempt. He gathered the shattered fragments of his self-confidence together as best he could after the explosion.

'Caroline, you pain me; you amaze me; you disappoint me. I think the interview had best come to an end.'

But she got between him and the door, looking so angry and determined that his dignity wholly collapsed and he cowered back into his chair.

'Confess first what you have just said was a lie,' she cried.

'I am not in the habit of speaking falsehoods,' he answered, with a comical attempt at dignity. 'Dr. Johnson specially inculcates the strictest accuracy amongst all whom he honours with his acquaintance.'

'Oh, bother Dr. Johnson! Was it a lie or the truth?'

'The truth.'

'Say it again.'

'With his own lips Mr. Anthony Jenkins told me that he was about to marry Miss Helen Vaughan. I saw him go into her house.'

'So!' She strove hard for self-restraint. The first wild flame of her anger seemed to have died out. Her wrath was at white-heat now, quiet, concentrated, dangerous. She grew pale even to the lips, and her black eyes blazed. 'You may go,' she said softly to Boswell, and opened the door for him to pass. 'Go, and forget your way back, you silly, stiff, stuck-up little mannikin. I marvel I put up with your tiresome tricks so long. Go, I say—go!'

He almost tumbled down the stairs in his hurry to be gone. The instant he was out of the house Carry dressed herself hastily for the street, yet even in her haste selected her handsomest pillorine and most becoming bonnet. Five minutes after Boswell's disappearance she was walking rapidly in the direction of the chambers of Anthony Jenkins, Esquire.

Meanwhile the said Anthony Jenkins had been engaged about his own love affair. Nellie's reception of his visit was quiet and self-contained, strictly

on the defensive. Of her strong repugnance there was no sign in look or voice.

The arrogant nature of the man took encouragement from the fact that after all that had come and gone she received him without anger. He knew but of one method of love-making—to come directly to the point, to carry the fortress, as he said, by storm.

‘Miss Vaughan,’ he said, ‘I have already tendered you my repentance for rudeness, for which your own charms were my sole and yet my sufficient excuse. To my repentance I would fain add my atonement. All that I have or am is at your service.’

‘I fear I do not understand you,’ said Nellie. She was resolved on plain speaking.

‘Your pardon,’ he answered, ‘encourages my presumption. I have the honour to ask your hand in marriage.’

In the pride of the great wealth which he now believed securely his own, the fellow actually believed that he was honouring her by his offer, and that she would accept it as an honour.

The great actress stifled her resentment. Only surprise appeared on her face or in her voice as she answered calmly :

‘’Tis doubtless a great honour, Mr. Jenkins, but our acquaintance has been but short ; I know but little of you, and that little, as you have confessed, not altogether to your advantage.’

‘Let me say without vanity,’ he answered arrogantly, ‘that I am a gentleman of position and fortune. As sole heir-at-law to my uncle, old Jenkins the miser, I——’

‘Sole heir-at-law!’ Nellie innocently interrupted. ‘I thought there was a will?’

Her eyes were on his face as she said it; not a look, not a movement, escaped her. She saw him start and wince; she noticed the shifty, cunning glance that shot from his small eyes.

‘A will!’ he cried sharply. ‘What will? Who told you of a will?’

‘You forget,’ she answered quietly, ‘that my dearest friend is Dr. Goldsmith, to whom the will was entrusted. He believes it is in favour of Mr. Roderick O’Connor.’

‘Dr. Goldsmith has still got the will in his possession?’ Jenkins asked sneeringly.

Then Nellie found the first secret she had set herself to learn. Jenkins knew the will was gone. He had stolen it or got it stolen.

‘Nay,’ she said slowly; ‘I perceive you know it is lost. How came you to know it is lost? He has told no one but myself of its mysterious disappearance.’

She looked him straight in the eyes as she spoke. There was no mistaking the meaning of the look. It said as plainly as words could say, ‘I believe you have stolen the will,’ but yet there was in her looks no trace of resentment at the theft. Jenkins’ confidence increased. He read approval in her glance, and liked her all the better for the lack of scruple which seemed to bring her nearer to himself.

‘Why trouble with what I know or don’t know? It suffices the will is gone for ever,’ he answered, with a smile that was in itself a confession. ‘It is

enough that everything is safe. Mr. Roderick O'Connor remains a pitiful pauper, and Anthony Jenkins, as was his right by blood and kindred, enjoys the great estate the miser hoarded, to share it freely with the loveliest woman in England.'

With that he would have embraced her, believing his suit already won, but she put up her hand in warning, and there was that in her steady, resolute eyes that held him back.

'You stole the will,' she said in a low voice, but still without a touch of reproof or resentment.

He flushed a dusky red at this plain speaking, and laughed awkwardly.

'These are dangerous words,' he answered in a whisper like her own. 'But say I did, what then?'

'You have destroyed it?' she queried; and, for all her self-restraint, there was a faint thrill of eagerness in her voice.

'Nay, that were a hanging matter if it were proved. On the contrary, I purpose returning the will intact to your friend Dr. Goldsmith at my own convenience.'

He laughed boisterously at her surprise.

'To return the will intact! But then you will forfeit the property,' she said.

'Not likely!' He laughed again. 'The property by that time will be mine, and yours, I hope, as well, safe against all claimants, Roderick O'Connor amongst the rest. Nay, do not question me as to the why or the wherefore, for I will not answer that. It is a secret I swear I will tell only to my wife. Marry me out of hand; in faith, I am dying of love

for you. I will get the license to-morrow, and I will give you this same will as a wedding gift, if it please you, to return to your anxious friend the doctor on your wedding day.'

'Why not before marriage,' Nellie asked, 'as well as after?'

'Because I don't choose—that's the plain why. I love you, Nell, but I won't wholly trust you till you are my own. Come, is it a bargain? I see a relenting look in your eyes; we will come to terms, I know. Nay, never shake your head. I will go straight about the license. What, not a buss at parting, sweetheart! Well, I must live in hopes.'

He flung himself gaily out of the room, and went briskly down the stairs, humming a gay song under his breath.

CHAPTER XXIX

SET A WOMAN TO CATCH A WOMAN

‘Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned,
Nor hell a fury like a woman scorned.’

ANTHONY JENKINS was not surprised to find Caroline in his sitting-room when he returned. She was pacing impatiently backwards and forwards, as an angry lioness paces her cage. He guessed instantly what had happened, and what was before him. There slid down his spine that queer little nervous thrill that catches a man when he stands under a shower-bath and pulls the string. But he braced himself to get the ordeal over.

She stopped suddenly in her swift pacing, and faced him.

‘What is this I hear of you?’

Her anger was his defence. He instantly put on the tough armour of sullenness.

‘How can I tell,’ he grumbled, ‘what you hear, or see, or think, or speak, who are never the same for an hour at a time? What new tantrum is this?’

‘Don’t lie to me. You know without telling why I have come. You have been visiting that actress woman Vaughan again this morning.’

‘How do you know that?’

‘It matters not how I know it, if it be true.’

‘I will not have my comings and goings spied upon. I have told you as much before.’

‘Is it true? is it true?’ she insisted.

‘And what if it is?’ he sulkily rejoined. ‘I have my reasons, as I have told you often, for such visiting. Roderick O’Connor woos her hotly; ’tis needful to keep her from his embraces.’

‘Nay, that shallow pretext will no longer serve. ’Twas a lie from the first, I well believe, but now it is a lie too clumsy to deceive an idiot. In one day more the six months will have sped, and O’Connor may marry whom he lists for you. He is scarce likely to marry his actress to-morrow, which is his last day.’

‘I know not that,’ muttered Jenkins sulkily; ‘one cannot be too sure.’

‘And if he does,’ she cried, ‘you have still the will in your safe keeping—the will that I secured for you at my own proper risk; so either way you are secure.’

‘The will may have been copied,’ he grumbled.

‘’Twas never copied, and you know it. Why try to put such clumsy lies on me—lies for which you cannot even hope belief? You love this actress, or you think you love her, and would marry her if you dared.’

‘How if I dared?’

‘Ay, if you dared; you have still to reckon with me. I have your promise sworn to me a thousand times. I have worked for you, I have schemed for

you, I have stolen for you, and, by Heaven ! I will hold you to your pledge.'

'You are a rare masterful wench. But 'tis well to have this display of temper before marriage than after it. These jade tricks of yours scarce promise a quiet home for a husband.'

His sneer stung her to fury.

'Have a care, Anthony Jenkins—have a care,' she cried. 'You are not safe yet, and I that have helped may hurt you if you drive me to it. 'Twas I got you the will ; 'tis I——'

She stopped in full career, biting her lips angrily, as though she had said more than she meant to say. Jenkins smilingly took the word from her.

'Quite true, my dear,' he said ; ' 'twas you got the will, for which I rest your servant ever. But you are too wise to think that I will return it for the asking. There has been enough of this mad jealousy ; you have soured my meals with it, and broken my sleep. If you take it on you thus early to rate and rail as a sweetheart, as a wife you would be clean unbearable. I'm d——d if I will stand it longer ! 'Tis better we should part, Carry, and part friends.'

'That you may marry your actress.'

'That is as it may be.'

'Never, never ! I swear it. Sooner would I——' Again her mood changed suddenly, or seemed to change. From anger and threats she fell to entreaties. 'I'm sorry, Toney,' she cried, and caught his hand and kissed it. 'Forgive me ; I was wrong to be angry and to anger you. I will worry you no

more. I care for no one but your own dear self, and I am sure that in your heart you love me best. Only say once more that you love me the best, and I will never doubt you again.'

Made abject by the extremity of her passion, she knelt to him, her dark eyes shining through her tears, every line and curve of the petitioning figure full of subtle entreaty and invitation.

But Jenkins, who felt that he had shaken himself half free, was not going to slip back into bondage. He locked himself the closer from her assailment in his armour of sulkiness.

'Nay, you have said as much before, Carry, and broken out an hour afterwards. You are not mistress of your own temper, nor am I, I must confess, of mine. We should lead but a cat-and-dog life together. 'Tis best for both we should part without more words.'

Then she realized what his purpose was from the first—that he had made her just complaints his excuse for desertion, and the fury of the slighted woman flamed in her.

'You cur and coward and liar!' she cried, 'I would scorn to sue to you. If you were now to grovel on your knees before me, I would spurn you, and you *would* crawl and whine if you but guessed my power and purpose.'

He laughed aloud at her anger with open brutality.

'Said I not so, mistress? 'Tis but a breath with you between love and hate, between penitence and fury. So you scold no longer; I care not what else you do. I prize at equal rate your best and worst.'

He held the door open to her with mocking courtesy. Her hand tingled to slap him on the cheek as he stood there smiling. Instead she curtsied low. But there was a malignant mockery in the glance the dark eyes gave him as she passed that troubled him even in the hour of triumph.

For more than an hour after Jenkins' visit Nellie had sat silent without moving, angry, ashamed, perplexed, ill at ease with herself and the world, striving hard, but without success, from the secrets she had surprised, from the infatuation she had inspired, to patch together some scheme for the recovery of the will.

Womanlike, she was not in the least degree particular as to the means ; for a woman wills the means when she wills the end. A man's honour and a woman's honour are things apart. The very worst of men have their points of honour, which they will die sooner than transgress. 'Tis with them rather a superstition than a religion. Honour allows them to lie to a woman, but not to a man. Honour compels them to atone by a sword-thrust or a pistol-shot to the injured husband whose home has been made desolate.

The very best of women, on the other hand, has no regard for honour as men understand the word. She will meet trick with trick and fraud with fraud. She will outlie the liar, outcheat the cheat, and out-trick the trickster in a good cause.

Nellie's conscience was troubled by no scruple that she had given to Jenkins at least an implied pledge that she would marry him, though she

had not the slightest intention of keeping the pledge.

What did worry her was the fear that the deceit should prove unavailing. Even for Goldsmith's sake or Roderick's she could not marry Jenkins, and Jenkins had sworn he would only restore the will after their marriage.

In the very height of her perplexity there came a knock to the room door, and the solution of the riddle with it.

'A lady to see you, miss,' the servant said; 'she would give no name.'

Some instinct warned Nellie who the lady was.

'Show her up at once,' she answered, and nerved herself for the coming duel.

Her instinct had not deceived her. Caroline walked into the room, closed the door behind her, and stood facing her rival. Her passion—and she made no effort to hide it—had not cooled. There were the marks of tears on her cheeks, though her eyes were dry now and very bright, and her face pale and rigid:

For one long minute the two women, so different, yet each so beautiful, stood facing each other without a word.

Nellie knew that a crisis was at hand. She kept her eyes on her opponent's, alert and vigilant as a fencer on guard before swords cross. Carry, in the eagerness of her anger, spoke first:

'Do you love him?' she cried abruptly.

Nellie feigned and parried this home-thrust.

'Love whom?' she asked in innocent surprise.

‘ You know whom I mean—Anthony Jenkins. Be frank with me, and I will be frank with you ; we may be able to help each other. If you love him, I have no business here, and will go. Do you love him—yes or no ?’

‘ No.’

‘ Then why are you going to marry him ?’

‘ I will be quite candid with you.’ It was a woman’s candour that ignored the one all-important fact that she was not going to marry him—that nothing on God’s earth would induce her to marry him. ‘ ’Tis not any love that I bear to Mr. Jenkins,’ she said, ‘ but my desire to restore the will stolen from Dr. Goldsmith.’

Carry flushed, and her eyes drooped for a second at the mention of the stolen will. Then she drew a deep breath of relief, and Nellie, keenly observant, noted a kind of exultation in her face.

‘ So you know of the stolen will. Do you know who stole it ?’

‘ I guess.’

‘ I stole it—for him.’

‘ So I guessed. Well, I want the will back for Dr. Goldsmith’s sake and another’s.’

‘ For Roderick O’Connor’s ?’

‘ Yes,’ Nellie answered without wincing, ‘ for Roderick O’Connor’s also ; and Mr. Jenkins has sworn to restore it within an hour of his marriage with me.’

‘ He won’t ; ’tis a simple trick of his to make a promise and break it.’

‘ Mr. Jenkins is a man of honour,’ said Nellie with admirable simplicity.

Carry stared at her amazed, and then broke out in scornful laughter, checked as suddenly as it began.

‘Forgive me,’ she said, ‘I know him, and you don’t. He wouldn’t give you the will if he could. He cannot give it because he hasn’t got it.’

‘He swears to me he has.’

‘I swear to you he has not.’

‘’Tis but oath against oath.’

‘I have proof, for I have the will to show.’

‘You said just now you stole the will for him, and gave it to him.’

‘I stole it for him, and afterwards I stole it from him. The proof is here.’

She drew the sealed packet from her bosom, and showed it to Nellie, stamped and sealed as Goldsmith had said.

Nellie measured the other woman with her eyes. Caroline was the taller, the stouter, the stronger ; but her Irish blood flamed hot in Nellie’s veins, and she resolved, if need be, to have the will from her by force. Still, nothing of this showed in the obedient face of the actress. She called up a look of surprise and gratitude, and put out her hand innocently for the will.

‘How can I ever thank you?’ she said sweetly.

‘Not so fast,’ Carry retorted, snatching the paper from her closing fingers ; ‘you must earn it before you get it.’

‘Earn it ? But how ?’

‘By never marrying Anthony Jenkins.’

‘That is easy. Give me the will, and I will give you my promise in return.’

‘ It seems a little too easy to be sure ; I won’t take your word for it.’

‘ What other security can you have ?’

‘ I have thought of that. You must seem to consent. You must go to the altar with him, and when he thinks himself most secure refuse to be his wife.’

Nellie paused, and seemed to hesitate. She had made up her mind, but did not wish to seem to be won too easily.

‘ ’Tis a hard task,’ she said at last, ‘ but I’ll do it.’

‘ To-morrow ?’

‘ To-morrow, if you wish.’

‘ At noon in St. Andrew’s Church. I must be there to see.’

‘ As you will. I will write to Mr. Jenkins to-night. I doubt not he will be ready and willing.’

‘ Ready and willing to meet his own ruin,’ the forsaken woman muttered with concentrated anger. Then to Nellie : ‘ Keep your side of the bargain, and I will keep mine. The moment your “No” is spoken in the church before his very eyes I will hand you the will.’

She turned to go, as though the matter was concluded, but Nellie called sharply to her :

‘ Stay a moment. I must have the will first ; I must have the will now. This is no time for politeness between us two. In your own plain words, I don’t trust you.’

‘ Can I trust you ?’

‘ You can. Look me straight in the face ; you know you can. I have stolen nothing ; I have told

no lies in this business. It is as well to speak plainly. I am the one to be trusted—not you.'

They looked each other steadily in the eyes for a moment.

Then Carry said at last: 'You must swear.'

'I'll swear anything you like, but I must have the will.'

'Then swear by your faith in God and your hope of heaven that you will go with him to the altar, and then publicly refuse him, and that up to the last moment you will not breathe a hint of your purpose to any living soul, and least of all to him—by your faith in God and your hope of heaven!'

Nellie's voice trembled a little as she whispered, 'I swear it.'

Without a word more Carry put the will into her hand.

CHAPTER XXX

THE VICTIM AT THE ALTAR

‘There’s many a slip
’Twixt the cup and the lip.’

WALKING swiftly homewards, full of wrath and yet remorseful, absorbed in a triumph that was more pain than pleasure, Caroline, at the first crossing, ran into the arms of Roderick O’Connor.

They had not spoken since the time he had found her dallying with Jenkins. Yet now, as, looking up, she saw into whose arms she had run, a sudden recklessness and malice inspired her to address him.

With uplifted hat and grave bow, he would have passed on, but she called out :

‘Tarry a moment for old time’s sake, Roderick. If you bear no malice, I bear none.’

‘Nay, I owe you thanks, not malice,’ he answered gravely.

The answer stung her with its contemptuous suggestion.

‘I take your meaning,’ she said, ‘you are glad you escaped me. Well, I will earn your further gratitude. You are jilted a second time, and I am glad to be the first to tell you of it. To-morrow, at

noon, in St. Andrew's Church, your actress lady-love marries the rich Anthony Jenkins. Have I touched you there ?'

'Not a whit,' he answered coldly. 'Miss Helen Vaughan is above the power of your slander.'

'But I swear it is true.'

'You have sworn oaths to me before now.' Bowing again with grave courtesy, he left her without another word.

'The fool !' she cried angrily. 'Yet he is much improved from the milksop I laughed at. How well he looked in his suit of blue velvet and fine lace ! I would he had believed me ; I would he were persuaded to the church. It would have been rare sport to have watched his face when Jenkins led his lady-love to the altar, and Toney's pride would have the sharper sting to be scorned and befooled before him. This Roderick is a fool still, who shuts his eyes close, and will believe no evil of the woman he loves.'

But though Roderick had made no sign of the wound she gave, her malicious words had struck deeper than she thought. He was full of angry unbelief. The news, he told himself, was an absurd and malicious lie.

But in spite of faith and reason the news troubled him. It troubled him the more as he had parted from Nellie in anger, and she had bidden him to come no more to her.

As usual he carried his trouble to Goldsmith. He found the gentle poet with Burke, Beauclerk, Johnson, and the inevitable Boswell sipping port

after dinner in a private room of the Mitre tavern.

Led on by the artful sympathy of Beauclerk, who almost choked with laughter, Boswell had given them in detail the incidents and ending of his morning's wooing.

'I cannot believe, sir,' Beauclerk cried with affected horror, 'that the heir in direct descent of the great house of Auchinleck, to speak nothing of your great personal merit, could be treated with such contumely.'

'I cannot blame your incredulity, sir,' Boswell gravely responded. 'Only the evidence of my own proper eyes and ears could have convinced me that such a thing was possible.'

'Sir,' cried Dr. Johnson, 'self-conceit is more discrediting than self-disparagement. Your lack of humour makes you the easy prey of the malicious. Sir, you voluntarily constitute yourself the target for ridicule, and invite the jibes of the malicious by the self-exposure of your folly.'

While Boswell was spluttering apology and explanation to his patron, Roderick took occasion to whisper what he had heard from Caroline to Goldsmith.

But Boswell's ears were ever alert as a rabbit on the brink of his burrow. Not a word of the whisper escaped him.

'Of course, I don't believe a word of it,' Roderick added in the same cautious undertone in Goldsmith's ear.

Boswell heard every word, and intruded into

their private talk without an instant's hesitation.

'But I happen to know, sir, that it is quite true. Anthony Jenkins himself told me to-day that he was about to marry the actress Nellie Vaughan to-morrow.'

'Surely 'tis not possible !' cried Roderick dumfounded.

'My dear boy,' Beauclerk answered lightly, 'all things are possible where women are concerned.'

'Woman's impelling instincts are more violent, and her restraining reason less stable, than man's,' added Johnson. 'Shakespeare, who, though guilty of occasional inaccuracy or imbecility, which I have felt constrained to expose, had a remarkable knowledge of human nature, has truly said, "Frailty, thy name is woman."'

'I cannot believe it true,' said Goldsmith.

'Goldsmith will have all women angels,' laughed Beauclerk. 'He cannot believe that Eve ate the apple, though Scripture tells us so.'

'But why should Carry lie to me ? Why should Jenkins lie to him ?' Roderick cried. 'Even liars do not lie without motive. They could have none here. Then she flung me off with angry word. My God ! I fear it is only too true.'

'I know 'tis false,' Goldsmith answered, 'because I know the girl. The dove does not mate with the vulture. You insult her, Roddy, by the very thought of it. There is an easy way to prove I am right. Come with me to-morrow to St. Andrew's

Church at—what hour did you say?—at twelve o'clock. I wager you a dinner for all our company you find no bridal party there.'

'Why not all go?' cried the irrepressible Boswell. 'If there be a wedding, we can congratulate Jenkins; if there be none, we can e'en congratulate O'Connor.'

'I approve of your suggestion, sir,' said Dr. Johnson, 'for reasons diametrically opposed to those you have advanced. Moreover, I restrict my approval to our assembling in the sacred edifice at the appointed hour. Should Dr. Goldsmith's prognostication prove well founded, we must take our good intentions for our recompense. But should this ill-assorted and inauspicious alliance be determined on, so far from congratulating the profligate on the success of his machinations, we will remonstrate with the maiden on the recklessness of her resolution.'

'In that case, sir,' said Beauclerk slyly, 'Jenkins, if he come, will come upon a bootless errand. It is impossible that any woman of intelligence, as I confess Miss Vaughan to be, can oppose her caprice to the convincing argument and the irresistible moral suasion of Dr. Johnson.'

'Why, sir, you may be right in that,' Johnson cried, much flattered.

'I know, sir, that I am right,' Beauclerk replied respectfully; 'tis from my own experience I avow it.'

'I'll bet you five guineas, Goldy,' Beauclerk whispered, 'that Toney Jenkins marries the girl.'

‘I am sure of her as of my own soul,’ Goldsmith answered indignantly.

‘Oh, I see,’ Beauclerk retorted in the same undertone; ‘you are sure enough to swear, but not to bet.’

‘To swear and to bet,’ Goldsmith retorted sharply, and Beauclerk booked the wager. Then, in answer to the silent entreaty of poor Roderick’s eyes, Goldsmith made a final but futile effort to induce Johnson to abandon his missionary expedition.

‘Twill prove but a fool’s errand, sir,’ he said; ‘a march up to an empty church’ and [a] march down again, and I know you love your bed of a morning.’

‘Sir, the prospect of accomplishing a great service, in my judgment, overbalances the risk of incurring a small inconvenience.’

‘But, sir, the story may be told to the town to disable your judgment should the errand prove bootless. The dignity of Dr. Johnson is at stake.’

‘Why, sir, ’tis impossible such a story should——’

Goldsmith glanced aside at the garrulous Boswell, and Johnson, following the direction of his eyes, stopped short and heistated, when Beauclerk interposed.

He was curiously excited, though he strove hard to keep up an appearance of unconcern, even of levity. Helen Vaughan had touched his heart, made callous by long usage of light loves. Her contemptuous repulse had hurt his vanity. It was a balm to his wounded self-love to believe that this

girl whom he had set on a pedestal had fallen off; that she, who had abashed him by her well-acted prudery, was at heart a mercenary jilt, not worth even a passing regret, a woman who could throw over a poor lover at an hour's notice to marry a rich rake.

Yet his pain at the thought was greater than the relief. The better nature of the man which still survived in him had faith in woman's truth and purity, and cried out against the thought of her unworthiness.

He would, yet would not, have the story true, but he meant at all hazard to be certain of its truth. So he now quietly interposed to egg Johnson on to his mission, determined that he himself would also be of the party.

'Dr. Johnson,' he said, 'has ever taught me that ridicule is a feeble weapon against virtue. It is intention, not success, that makes an action good or evil.'

'You are in the right, sir,' cried Dr. Johnson, his hesitation vanishing before this well-applied encouragement. 'Nay, Goldy, no more on it. I shall not fail at the appointed hour or rendezvous. Now for bed. An early submission to Morpheus means an easy release.'

Dr. Johnson kept his word. He was at the church a full half-hour before the time, the faithful Boswell following obsequiously at his heels.

But, early as he was, Roderick O'Connor and Goldsmith were there before him, and greeted him as he entered in that muffled whisper which one

instinctively uses in a church. A few minutes later Beauclerk, who had watched them from a little distance, himself unseen, sauntered in with exaggerated carelessness.

The church was a small gloomy, out-of-the-way building. Probably it was on that account it had been selected. At this early hour it was quite empty but for a single woman, closely veiled, who knelt at her devotion under the shadow of the organ loft.

A single glance told Roderick that it was not the woman he sought, yet did not wish to find.

Made awkward by the strangeness of their errand, the party gathered together in a dim corner of the church, and talked in whispers.

How slowly the time passed ! Roderick looked at his watch half a dozen times in ten minutes, believing an hour must have gone.

A cheering assurance grew slowly warm in him. He had wronged her love by his thoughts ; she would not come.

All at once his heart gave one great beat, and he stood still, for Nellie herself came quietly into the church. The slanting light of a high window touched her face as she passed. She was pale, but quite composed. She spoke a word or two to the kneeling woman as she passed, and took her place quietly in front of the altar.

A moment later Jenkins entered, a stout, red-faced clergyman walking by his side, with boots that creaked solemnly as he walked. Then all hold on doubt was lost.

There was no hitch nor pause in the proceedings. Jenkins knelt beside Nellie, the clergyman took his place before them, with his back to the altar, and the marriage ceremony began.

The party in the background seemed for a moment fascinated by the swiftly-acted scene.

But as the clergyman uttered the first word, Roderick, beside himself with excitement, cried : 'Stop ! I forbid the banns,' and rushed forward ; the others followed more slowly.

The clergyman, dumfounded at the sudden interruption, let the book fall flat on the floor. With a curse and scowl Jenkins turned fiercely on the intruders. Nellie, startled by the sudden sound of that familiar voice, stood stock-still, blushing and trembling, her eyes fixed on the ground. Her teeth pressed her under-lip hard, her finger-nails dented the soft palms. All her nerves and muscles were on the strain. If she let herself go for a moment she felt she must break into a wild passion of hysterical weeping and laughter.

Jenkins spoke with surly authority, not wholly without dignity.

'What is the meaning of this boisterous intrusion ? Do you pretend to control the free-will of this lady or mine ? Can you offer any valid reason against our marriage ?'

Roderick's hand itched to answer with a blow. But the place restrained him. Without a word or look he turned from him to Nellie.

'Miss Vaughan,' he said, 'I have no right to interpose between you and the man of your choice.

But my respect and affection gives me the right to ask if you do this thing of your own free-will, and to offer you my help if you need it.'

As Nellie never looked at him, never answered a word, he went on in earnest entreaty, overmastered by his passionate love.

'For God's sake, Nellie, take care what you do. Don't let yourself be coaxed or tricked into this most unworthy marriage. Whatever your motives may be, there is still time to escape.'

But Nellie's resolute spirit had returned. She was resolved to play the part out to the end. The strong dramatic element in the scene appealed to her artistic instincts. She began to feel a sort of frightened enjoyment of the situation, and a longing for the startling denouement.

'Mr. O'Connor,' she said coldly, but without looking at him, 'I thought you knew me better than to think me a fool or a coward. What I do, I do of my own free choice.'

'I have no more to say,' said poor Roderick, utterly abashed.

'We are deeply grateful,' sneered Jenkins, 'for your forbearance. I suppose, by your gracious permission, the marriage may go on?'

'No, sir,' said Dr. Johnson sternly; 'I will not see unsophisticated innocence wedded to designing profligacy without uttering my admonitory protest. Young woman, the man beside you adds the guilt of the remorseless homicide to the wiles of the treacherous seducer. It is the uncompassionate slaughterer of innocent men, and the ruthless

betrayed of confiding women, you have chosen for your husband.'

But Nellie, anticipating the sequel, looked smilingly in the face of the indignant doctor, as she answered, with the faintest flavour of mimicry in her voice :

'Dr. Johnson, I am grateful for your admonition, an admonition inspired, I doubt not, by intelligence, and enforced by morality. But I am well assured that any confidence I repose in Mr. Anthony Jenkins can by no possibility be betrayed.'

'Why, madam,' cried Boswell pertly, 'when Dr. Johnson, whose wisdom and authority are recognised by the entire town, condescends to expostulate, you should——'

'Silence, sir,' growled Johnson; 'I do not choose to have this perpetual bell-ringing.'

Beauclerk, meanwhile, slipped up close to the bride-elect under cover of Johnson's loud expostulation. He now whispered softly in her ear :

'I thank you, Miss Vaughan, for your prudent rejection of my unworthy suit. I would not chose to be the rival for your favour with Mr. Anthony Jenkins.'

The taunt stung Nellie to the quick, but before she could reply Goldsmith spoke with the ring of simple earnestness in his honest voice.

'Nellie, my dear girl, for my sake, for your own sake, for all our sakes, I entreat you not to do this wicked thing. I could not believe it possible when I heard it ; I can hardly believe it possible now even with your own assurance. 'Tis so unlike the Nellie

I knew and loved. I cannot guess your motive, yet I know 'tis a good one, but I know also 'tis mistaken. Nothing could justify this horrible sacrifice. 'Tis a degradation and a profanity. 'Twill bring misery on you and all who love you. Turn back, Nell—turn back before it is too late.'

For the first time she showed herself affected. The tears filled her eyes and overflowed. Her lips quivered so for a moment she could not speak. Instinctively, involuntarily, she glanced aside at the veiled woman who had edged nearer and nearer to the group.

Then she dried her eyes with vigorous dabs of a little lace handkerchief, and spoke very gently, but firmly withal :

'Dearest of friends, it breaks my heart to pain you. But I have sworn a solemn oath to go to the altar with Mr. Anthony Jenkins, and I must, and will, keep that oath. You have trusted me always, will you not trust me a little longer? If you knew all you would not blame me. Please do not speak again'—for he would have renewed his protest—'twill but prolong your pain and mine.'

She turned abruptly to Anthony Jenkins. 'I am quite ready,' she said, and stood up beside him before the clergyman. The ceremony instantly recommenced. There was no further interruption. The clergyman came to the words 'Do you, Anthony Jenkins, take this woman for your lawful wife?' and Jenkins answered, in a loud, determined voice,

‘ I do,’ and as he said it scowled an insolent challenge to the indignant spectators.

‘ Do you, Helen Vaughan, take this man as your lawful husband ?’

Clear and distinct her answer rang out a scornful
‘ No !’

CHAPTER XXXI

GOLDSMITH GIVES THE BRIDE AWAY

‘And that my love may appear plain and free,
All that was mine in Silvia I give thee.’

THE dead silence of utter amazement for a moment fell upon them all. Then once again, clear and impassioned as in some great drama, Nellie’s voice broke the profound silence.

‘You ask me why? Because I know this man to be a homicide, a murderer, a profligate, a liar, and a thief. I have sworn to reject him with all scorn, and I have kept my word. Dearest friend’—she turned, half laughing, half crying, to Goldsmith—‘dearest and best of friends, so this comedy that you thought a tragedy ends happily after all, and this is the fee for my performance,’ as she drew the sealed packet from her bosom and put it into his hands.

He took it without a word, bewildered with amazement. Roderick stood dazed, like one reprieved with the rope round his neck. Johnson puffed and blowed in inarticulate triumph.

‘Bravo! bravo!’ cried Beauclerk softly under his breath.

But Nellie's eyes and ears were open and alert.

She saw Jenkins, dumfounded at first, blaze up into sudden fury as the meaning of her words reached his brain. His face flushed a dull red, his coarse features were distorted with rage. He raised his huge fist as though he would strike her to the ground. But already the group of spectators were recovering from their surprise, and Roderick pushed between the two. Then Jenkins suddenly changed his purpose, and slunk away like a dog whipped and cowed.

Nellie alone noticed the veiled woman leave her seat, and at the same moment move quickly across the church to intercept him as he passed. Jenkins flung her off with a growl like a wild beast and a push so rough that it was almost a blow. But she clung to him, and whispered something in his ear, and he stopped and listened. Another whisper, and Nellie saw the two slink back into the shadow, their eyes fixed eagerly on Goldsmith, who still idly fingered the packet in utter bewilderment.

'Open it!' cried Nellie imperatively to Goldsmith—'open it at once and read!'

He smiled indulgently, and pointed to the superscription.

'I cannot open it till Roderick's wedding-day,' he said.'

'Oh, you men, you men, you men, with your silly scruples! Never mind the dead man's whim; open it now, I say. Can't you see those two are plotting some new mischief? Every moment is important.'

'Nay, I cannot, Nell,' he answered gently. ''Tis

a sacred trust from a dead friend. My honour forbids me.'

'Out on your honour!' she cried impetuously. 'You men have no sense at all.'

Before he could guess her purpose she snatched the packet from his hand, tore open the seals, and read.

'There! there!' she cried excitedly, 'I told you so. Read there.' She thrust the paper back into his hands. 'This was what they plotted for; to-morrow would have been too late. To-morrow Roderick would have been a pauper, and the fortune would have gone to that thief and cheat. Don't you see it there plain writ, Roderick must marry to-day, now, at once?'

Suddenly she realized the meaning of her advice, and stopped short, blushing furiously.

Her excitement quite subdued, she passed the paper gently back to Goldsmith's hands.

'I beg your pardon,' she said demurely, 'my work is done. Good-bye.' She dropped a stately curtsey to Johnson, and gave her hand to Goldsmith.

But Goldsmith held tight the hand she gave him, and would not let her pass.

'Nay, Nellie,' he said, smiling, 'your work is but begun.'

'I fear to ask what I shall die to lack,' said Roderick humbly.

'Nell, Nell,' cried Goldsmith earnestly, 'you lectured me just now that I would let a foolish scruple wrong my friend. A man's honour may be too nice, I see, or a maid's coyness. May I?'

He took her silence for consent, and put the passive hand he held softly into Roderick's eager clasp.

'We came for a wedding, Miss Vaughan,' said the courtly Beauclerk, 'and you must not disappoint us. This time I offer my respectful congratulations. I will be honoured if you will use this ring for the ceremony.' He slipped a handsome diamond ring from his little finger, and handed it to Roderick. ''Tis plain gold at the back,' he said.

But the red-faced clergyman, who had been most surprised of all by the unexpected turn of affairs, now found voice at last to protest.

'I and my office,' he stammered, 'have been most shamefully flouted. I will stay no longer.'

'Pardon me, sir,' interposed Dr. Johnson, with that stately courtesy which he could on occasion so well assume, 'in the Rev. Dr. Burchall I recognise an acquaintance to whom my presumption prompts me to apply the more intimate title of friend.'

'Dr. Johnson! the great Dr. Johnson!' cried the clergyman, astonished, flattered, delighted.

'When there was no intentional discourtesy,' said Dr. Johnson, 'there can be no reasonable umbrage. You have, on the contrary, Rev. Sir, reason to rejoice that you were not made the unconscious instrument of a fraud. There is urgent necessity for your officiatory functions to incorporate these two in one. Allow my articulate persuasion to supplement their silent entreaty.'

'To all who honour virtue and learning,' cried the delighted clergyman, 'Dr. Johnson's persuasions are commands.'

‘Sir,’ said Boswell, seeing a loophole to creep into the conversation, ‘I have ever said so. When a man of his sublime genius condescends to speak, it is for us lesser mortals to silently obey.’

Johnson patted him on the head benignly, yet reprovingly withal, as an over-pert boy.

‘Oh, Bozzy, Bozzy,’ he said, ‘you honour silence less in the breach than in the observance.’

Meanwhile Roderick had led Nellie, timid now, and quite subdued, back to her place before the altar.

The Rev. Dr. Burchall opened his book, then closed it again.

‘We cannot proceed without a special license,’ he objected.

‘I have got it here, sir,’ said Roderick.

‘Egad, he comes with his ammunition ready,’ murmured Beauclerk.

‘It seems quite regular,’ said the clergyman, glancing over the license.

Presently he asked, ‘Who gives this woman to this man?’

‘Nay, that privilege is mine,’ said Goldsmith, stepping close to the blushing bride. He smiled as he said it, but his honest eyes were dim with tears.

‘Never fret for me, Nell,’ he whispered, so softly that only she could hear; ‘with my free-will and blessing I give you to the man you love.’

THE END

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